

# St. James' E-pistle

## August 28, 2015

### Pulpit Notes

Brothers and Sisters:

Let's talk about buildings. There's no way to get around the fact that among the biggest expenditures in most churches - and certainly in the case of St. James' - are the buildings and grounds.

Churches have buildings, often many of them. Often, they are oversized and glorious. Who doesn't love that architecture? Once upon a time, it was considered a matter of civic pride to have a large church - or several. The larger the better, the more ornate the greater the praise of God.

But those were the days when churches were filled to overflowing, or they were subsidized by the state or rich patrons looking to build their legacy. Those days are gone.

In our current climate, where an increasing number of people have been put off by "the church" - usually lumping all Christian denominations together - it is no longer a societal requirement to belong to a church. On the bright side, that means we are here because we feel called by God. It also gives us a large field in which to sow the seeds of God's love - lots of grain ready for harvest! On the down side, that leaves lots of buildings designed for lots of people, all in an era where buildings are much more expensive to maintain than before.

When our current church was built in 1844, for example, it had no heat, no electricity, no plumbing. Insurance was a tiny fraction of costs. And it was mostly paid for by one guy who was also the architect. Our parish house was paid for by a single bequest, built with grand plans for a school and supported by hundreds of parishioners. Lest we forget, oil and electricity were dirt cheap in those days.

Today, our youngest building is 60 years old. We have nearly 10 acres of land to maintain, four acres of which are an aging graveyard. We spend thousands of dollars just making sure aging trees don't fall down on people.

So...at a time when our parish - and for what it's worth, our entire town - is not growing numerically, our costs are rising dramatically. I don't believe in gloom and doom, nor do I intend to engage in it now. There's a lot of good going on, but we do need to look at things the way they are.

One of the temptations for parish leaders - and one of the biggest dangers for the life of a church - is to focus on buildings and grounds. We look at what needs to be repaired, at

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overhead, at rentals and other building use. We're so busy looking at the church buildings that we miss the church.

I've often joked that my next church is going to be in a mall or a storefront. Or maybe it'll be one of the new type of church where everything fits into the trunk of a car, and services are held in the park! I like that idea of traveling light.

But that's not who we are. That's not St. James', and that's just fine. St. James' is blessed with a church, a large parish house, a chapel, its free-standing and quite old shed, a graveyard with many mausoleums, a rectory, and another newly renovated free-standing shed. Not counting mausoleums and sheds, that's four sizable buildings.

Just so you know, we are not easily allowed to get rid of property or buildings, so for the moment, love them or hate them, St. James' will keep all its land and buildings.

The question is, how do we afford to keep them so they don't take away from our primary mission which is and always has been to grow in Christ and to make Christ's love for all humanity palpably known. How do we keep our buildings from being a burden and instead make them an asset in our Christian mission?

I would like to suggest that the first step is to accept that this is where God has planted us. You probably tire of hearing me say that initially I was not attracted to the church building here (for my own architectural reasons). But that did not mean that I didn't recognize God's hand here, nor that I hesitated when it became clear this was where God wanted me to come. "Bloom where you're planted," was the word that came to me.

So, these are the buildings and grounds God has put into our trust. They are expensive, true, but they have so much potential to do so much good.

Let's start with the church itself. We keep the doors open from 6:30 AM to 6:30 PM so people can come in and pray. It is also a stop for tourists, but that's not for us to differentiate. I know that people stop in to pray because on occasion they leave notes. Sometimes it's just a "Thank you for being open," sometimes it's, "I grew up here and was hoping to see it one more time." And once it was, "Thank you for being open. Stopping to pray literally saved my life."

Quite beside that, however, is the function of the church. This is where we pray together. This is the gathering place for our prayers, our communal life. Sure, coffee hour and meals together are important, but our common worship has always been central to our life together. Sure, you can worship in the woods or in a home or just about anywhere, but from the beginning of the church, we have been setting aside places specific to worship in part to make clear just how important it is to our faith.

Our parish hall may never have become the school originally intended, but it does continue to serve many important functions. We do have a school - a nursery school, to be sure, but the lives it touches are positively impacted. Young adults still come to me and say, "Fr. Chuck!

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Remember me from nursery school?" Our own Sunday School helps shape young lives, and it is important that we have a space for them. This is where we have our pageants and dinners and Lenten Breakfasts. Then there's the choir that rehearses, and our offices. And of course, think of the groups that meet there: Boy Scouts, Adventure Scouts, AA, SA, Schylkill Embroidery Guild,

I could go on about the chapel and the three churches that worship there as well as the Fireside Chats. Or the Graveyard Tours which bring so many to our little congregation.

My point is, these are the buildings and grounds that we have. They are under our care and, yes, they are a giant, painful part of our budget. But we have the option to make them work for us, for the spread of the gospel. When we bring people here, not just for any old events but for events that will lift up, inspire, encourage and make people glad to be in God's world - then these buildings are not white elephants but vehicles for the journey toward the Kingdom of Heaven.

I don't want us to focus on buildings, mind you. I want us to focus on learning who God is, understanding Christ in our collective lives, reaching out in understanding to the disenfranchised, reaching out to and growing in love for those who need us (as we need them). We'll talk about what that ministry can look like - and cost - later.

But let us always remember that this is where God has put us, and the challenges particular to this congregation are just that - challenges. Everywhere you go, you'll face them, but ours - our buildings - are more than buildings, more even than heritage: they are our tools for ministry.

In Christ,

Chuck+

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### **The News of the Church**

**Tour Guides and Crew Needed!** We've had a good response for our TOUR GUIDES and CREW, especially considering that so many are on vacation! But we still need more volunteers. Please stop by and have a look at the clip boards for our needs. Or call Bobbie Wells to see how you can help.

Tour Guides and Actors will start rehearsals in early September, so please sign up now!

**Actors Needed:** All but one role has at least one actor now! We need the following:

1 Rev. John McVickar - a younger man (mid-20s, early 30s would be ideal but can go older). First rector of St. James'. **We have one actor for this role and need another!**

2 Catherine Carl - almost any age can work (20s - 90s. She lived a long time). Richard's daughter. **We have one actor for this role and need another!**

3 Emma Victoria Pitkin Marshal - 50-70ish woman. Poetess of Hyde Park. **We have one actor for this role and need another!**

**Rebuild the Churches Fund:** Bishop Dietsche has asked each parish of our Diocese to join him in contributing to the rebuilding of the seven African-American churches that burned recently. **We will hold this special collection on Sunday, August 30th.**

**Episcopal Relief and Development** will be highlighted in September with a special collection honoring their 75th Anniversary celebration being held on **Sunday, September 27th.**

If you have any questions, please contact Joanne Lown or Deacon Gail. Thank you!

**Got Oil?** St. James' is a partner with the Dutchess County Interfaith Counsel which has an agreement with Love Effron Oil to reduce oil costs. Because of the collective size of the organization, we get a reduced rate for oil. We recently received word from Love Effron that they would now like to extend these discounts to all members, volunteers, and employees of the member churches. While this is undoubtedly an effort to attract new customers, discounts also apply to current customers.

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We don't act as promoters of any business, but if this is something that can save you a little money because of your association with St. James', we are happy to be of use. I believe you need to contact Love Effron directly and mention your relationship with St. James'. If you do so, please contact Fr. Chuck to let him know how it works out.

**Take Some Business Cards:** Share your church with your friends and neighbors with a St. James' Business Card. You never know when you have the opportunity to help someone find their way to God.

### **The News of the Diocese**

**Diocesan Cycle of Prayer:** Please pray for these diocesan ministries this week. If you want to check out the entire year's calendar for intercession, it's simple to find - go to <http://www.diocesenyn.org> and click under "Beliefs and Practices."

August

30 The Standing Committee of the Diocese

31 All older adults in the diocese and those who work in older adult ministries

September

1 Candidates who are to be ordained to the Priesthood

2 The Church of the Epiphany, Manhattan

3 Calvary/St. George's Parish, Manhattan

4 St. John's in the Village, Manhattan

5 The Church of the Atonement, The Bronx

### **Praying For Peace Everywhere:**

Let us continue to light a candle for peace in the Holy Land - and everywhere. Prayer is our most potent antidote to hatred.

#### **1. Candle for Peace**

Please also light a candle on Fridays - holy to both faiths - for Peace

Let us Light Candles for Peace

Two mothers, one plea:

Now, more than ever, during these days of so much crying,

on the day that is sacred to both our religions, Friday, Sabbath Eve

Let us light a candle in every home - for peace:

A candle to illuminate our future, face to face,

A candle across borders, beyond fear.

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From our family homes and houses of worship  
Let us light each other up,  
Let these candles be a lighthouse to our spirit  
Until we all arrive at the sanctuary of peace.

### 2. **The Mothers Prayer:**

God of Life:

You who heals the broken hearted, binding up our wounds.

Please hear this prayer of mothers.

You did not create us to kill each other

Nor to live in fear or rage or hatred in your world. You created us so that we allow each other to sustain Your Name in this world:

Your name is Life, your name is Peace.

For these I weep, my eye sheds water:

For our children crying in the night,

For parents holding infants, despair and darkness in their hearts.

For a gate that is closing – who will rise to open it before the day is gone?

With my tears and with my constant prayers, With the tears of all women deeply pained at these harsh times

I raise my hands to you in supplication: Please God have mercy on us.

Hear our voice that we not despair That we will witness life with each other, That we have mercy one for another, That we share sorrow one with the other, That we hope, together, one for another.

Inscribe our lives in the book of Life

For Your sake, our God of Life Let us choose Life.

For You are Peace, Your world is Peace and all that is Yours is Peace,

May this be your will

And let us say Amen.

*Sheikha Ibtisam Mahameed and Rabba Tamar Elad-Appelbaum  
English Translation Amichai Lau-Lavie*

### **Please keep the following people in your prayers:**

Ruth Blanding, John Bohlmann, Susie Buhalis, Jim And Sharyn Burke, Joann Clark, Michael Day, Dottie Drake, Ross Eames, Jr., Linkin Ewalt, Steven Foote, Heather Francese, Jack Gordy, Robert Guariglia, Harold Hall, Dalton K., Edie Kline, Barbara Knakal, Ashley Konyn, Rosemary Leuken, Joanne Lynn, Doris Mack, Gordon Mackenzie, Virginia Mackenzie, Andrew Mendelson, Rev. Tim Millard, Charles Pardee (husband of Sally), Clifford Plass, Gerald Plass, Grace Plass, Linda Plass, Deborah Porach, John Robinson, Richard Secor, James Sheeky, Naomi Slight, Marguerite Spratt, Janice Syedullah, Tracy, Candace Vincent, Cassidy Way, Cliff Wells and Shawn Wheeler.

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### **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 (this past week):	Liz Van Wagner and Tess Manning
Birthdays (next week):	Laura Seagren, Annabeth Gausepohl, Patty Caswell, Kristin Cotton, Christopher Dingee, Sara Dingee and Laura Kinne
Acolytes:	August 30: Deirdre Mae Micker September 6: Jaylen Thatcher
Altar Guild:	August 30: Team Number II September 6: Team Number II
8 a.m. Readers:	August 30: Angela Henry and Grant Ferris September 6: Deb Belding and Sue DeLorenzo
10 a.m. Readers:	August 30: Patty Caswell and Sophie Ciferri September 6: Regina Ardini and Paul O'Halloran
Ushers:	August 30: Dean Caswell and Austin Horne September 6: Bill and Regina Ardini
Pledge Clerks:	August 30: Paul Littlefield September 6: Janet Bright and Joanne Lown
Parish Cycle of Prayer:	August 30: Doug and Deb Belding, David and Carol Bender and John and Donna Beyer September 6: Robin Bohlmann; Justin, Danielle & Emerson Bohlmann and Janet Bright
Coffee Hour Hosts:	August 30: No Coffee Hour September 6: Audrey Horne; Deb and Doug Belding

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### **This Week's Lectionary**

Song of Solomon 2:8-13

Psalm 45:1-2, 7-10

James 1:17-27

Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

NOTE: Audio recordings of some sermons are now available on St. James' website, [www.stjameshydepark.org](http://www.stjameshydepark.org) Look under "Worship"

Sermon Preached on  
Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost  
(August 23, 2015)

"Concrete Thinking"

I might get in a little trouble with some people today, but I'm going to tell you my great heresy. I don't take every word in the bible literally. In fact, I don't even believe that everything in the bible is necessarily true. I'll go even further: I believe some of the stuff in the Old Testament is intentionally inaccurate- you might call it revisionist history. Want an example?

Solomon's temple.

To be honest, I think God could not have cared less whether or not Solomon built a temple. The texts were written centuries after the events, so there's every reason to think there was a little cleaning up of the historical record - as in, David never built a temple, maybe because he never thought it was necessary, maybe because he was occupied with other things and just never thought about it. The biblical record says he wanted to, but God prevented him. Remember how God told Nathan, "Did I ask for a temple? Do I need a temple?" And yet, God allows Solomon, to build one. This doesn't really make sense, and few biblical scholars have come up with any very convincing argument for it.

Which is why I suspect the story of the temple's construction was revisionist history. Solomon wanted to build a temple, probably for his own glorification since big temples were a way of showing earthly power. But they couldn't say that, so the historians came up with a divine reason.

Either way, even Solomon recognized that Israel had existed as an independent country for nearly 500 years without a temple, that God did not need it, and that his building could never contain God. So Solomon's prayer, even the part about it being a place where even foreigners could pray, falls a little flat.

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And history was not kind to the temple. It became a place for armies to attack and destroy as a sign of control over their victims. When the Israelites rebuilt it, it was only partly in fidelity to God - it was also a mark of defiance to their former masters. In time, that temple also fell victim to war. And of course, today, the Temple Mount is a place of devotion but also tension and violence.

So my question is, did Solomon, by building the temple, make God closer or more distant from the people? Did his attempts at putting the divine into concrete - okay stone - make God more glorious or just less accessible?

This is a constant fear for me. Do we make our buildings the goal of our church? Do we focus on the buildings or on God? When you come in, is your mind on how cold or hot it is? Or the plaques? Or the smell? Or is it on the God who transcends the physical and yet still embraces us in arms of love? Is your mind on the quality of the music or on the depth of the self-giving of Jesus? Is it on the flavor of the bread and wine or on the eternal nature of the Body of Christ? In other words, do we churches make God closer or farther away from people by our church buildings?

I wish I knew. But I do know this. These are the buildings God has entrusted to us in our generation. We don't have to worry about whether we should build a temple - it's already here. What we have to worry about is how we use these buildings to make God's presence known. If we're not doing that, then it doesn't matter if we have a grand cathedral or a wooden shack because it's not worth having.

Indeed, Jesus talks about meeting him not in a place but a sacrament. He not only is in the bread and wine, but he IS the bread of heaven. Again, we can't get too literal and worry about chewing the bread lest we hurt Jesus (as some churches used to teach). He is the bread of eternal life, and it is in our COMMUNION that we are present with him in a new way.

Our God - as Solomon acknowledged - cannot be contained by these walls, nor by the earth nor the universe itself. To think this is the only place we can encounter God, then, is absurd.

But it IS a place set aside for us to come together to focus on God, to worship God TOGETHER. And That does make this concrete, physical place have value.

If, that is, we really do come together.

So, let's be clear: God is not contained by these walls - but in our worship together, we can be sure that God is here. Amen.