
A New Year, New Rhythms, Christ's Hope

Christmas greetings to you!

Sure, it's the New Year, but as the people of Christ, this is, first and foremost, the season of Christ's birth and its celebration. We have waited for the Light to come (Advent), and now we celebrate Christ (Christmastide).

The Season of Christmas lasts from December 24 through January 6, with the celebration of Epiphany. In the yearly cycle of the church year, the liturgical calendar, we condense the early days of Jesus' life into this 12-day season of light, feasting, and connecting. Now that we are in the new year, we look forward. Where will the story of Jesus lead us this year? How will we hear the call of God in fresh ways as we navigate all the challenges and blessings we will face?



When we learn to attend to the season of Christmas, not just as a single day but as an entire sequence of celebrations, we can frame all of life in the story of Jesus for the days to come. Instead of the opening of January being about re-engaging with the grind of daily life, we can see it as the season that launches us into the story of Jesus. In the months to come, we will explore the Jesus story through his ministry, his Transfiguration, and his Passion. We will practice the time of Lent, where our focus will draw even closer into the struggles of faithfulness and how Christ walks with us as we carry our crosses. These sequences of celebration, formation, and action mark the arc of the Christian year.

I hope for our church that this year will be one of celebration, formation, and action. As some of you know, I plan to take a 3-month sabbatical this year, starting in July. In preparation for this, we will celebrate — marking seven years of life together in this community. I have been fortunate to be awarded a grant to help fund my activities during my sabbatical. With it, we also have funds to devote to congregational formation and growth in parallel. We will spend time this year looking at our Rhythms and Rules of Life — connecting the arc of our days with the seasons of the Christian year. I hope we can examine our spiritual practices and consider what it means to grow deeper in our faith together.

In this same theme of spiritual growth and formation, we will also prioritize the spiritual practice of rest — sabbath keeping. As I take time to rest in accordance with the guidance we have for pastors, I hope we can also learn together what it means to practice the sabbath in our weekly rhythms. Part of growing into the celebration of Jesus' presence with us (Christmas) is to learn how to rest in His presence, the Christ with us who says, "Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Christ calls us to action AND rest. The two together bring wholeness.

Continued...

So, at the outset of this year, consider these questions in hopes they spark ideas and begin to help you plan for how you will seek growth and rest in Christ in the months ahead:

- Where do you find yourself most weary?
- Who in your daily life brings you joy and “fills your cup?”
- How do you feel spiritually? Where are you “at” in your journey?
- What are you desiring to see change?

I pray that as we continue our journey together this liturgical year (and beyond), you will feel empowered to examine your spiritual growth, be honest about your hopes and fears, and deepen your sense of belonging to a people who are all walking together, looking for the face of Jesus in one another, serving in compassionate, joyful, loving ways.

Grace and peace,

Pastor Seth

SESSION HIGHLIGHTS

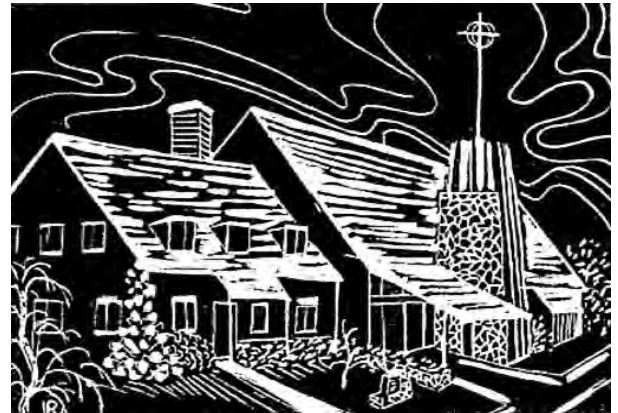
submitted by Faye Hill, Clerk of Session

Highlights of the Session Meeting on December 10, 2023

- All members of the Session were present at our meeting on December 10, 2023.
- Deacon representative, Amy Morriss, thanked the Session for their help with the recent Parish Lunch. The Deacons decided to rename the event “Autumn Lunch” to help all members of the congregation know that they are welcome, not just those in parishes.
- Treasurer Katie Dunne gave a full financial report for the month of November:

Beginning Balance	\$136,175.85
Income	\$25,805.32
Expenses	\$28,123.30
Ending Balance	\$133,857.87

- Several weeks ago, the Session sent letters to members who have not attended and/or been active in the life of the church over a long period of time, asking them to let the church know what they would like to do about their membership status. After receiving their responses, the Session voted to remove 23 people from the rolls.
- The Board of Trustees reported that they met in November.
- The Finance Committee gave an encouraging report on the incoming pledges.
- The Nominating Committee reported that they are completing their work. New officers will be ordained and/or installed later this month.
- The Session reviewed the Terms of Call for the Pastor for 2024. The Session will vote on this in January.
- Pastor Seth Thomas announced that the Annual Meeting is scheduled for January 28, 2024.
- Pastor Seth will be on vacation December 26 – 31.
- There is an ongoing need for ushers and greeters.



CHRISTIAN FAITH FORMATION

Submitted by Tracy Caruso, Children & Family Ministry Director,



Greetings from the Director of Children and Family Ministries!

Wishing you all a very Happy New Year as we begin 2024. As we begin this new year, and look forward to another amazing year at St. James, I like to look back at what the previous year brought us.

As many of you know, I closed my business of 16 years at the end of 2022 and was given an extra 10 hours a week here at St. James. I am so excited with what those extra 10 hours gave to our children and family ministries programs this year.

Our youth group has been regularly meeting each month and have had some really fun and meaningful time together, including a trip to the bowling alley, and a fun Christmas party with First Presbyterian Church. They also wrote and sent postcards to all of our St. James families and set up our Angel tree. We are looking forward to another great year of fun and community outreach.

Our Godly Play curriculum included many new stories, with materials made yet again by our amazingly talented Claude Hill. It was as amazing for me to tell the new stories as it was for the kids to hear and see them. I also wrote a couple of stories based in the Godly Play style, which was a fun departure from our traditional curriculum.

In June we celebrated our milestone Sunday with a record, for the time I have been in this position, 30 youth and children to recognize. It was a fun Sunday to see how our program is growing.

We also held Camp Creation Vacation Bible School here at the end of June in partnership with First Presbyterian Church. We had over 40 kids and 30 volunteers at St. James for a week of Godly Play stories, crafts, games, music, science and so much more. We even had an armadillo, and learned about the Australian outback, and got to try some tasty treats. An amazing time was had by campers and volunteers and we are looking forward to another fun VBS in 2024.

Summer at St. James was super fun with not just VBS, but also a St. James day at the Bellingham Bells, a great all church picnic at the new Squalicum creek park, and several Trail Mixers outings to various hikes around Bellingham. As busy as our summer was, it led into an even busier fall.

September brought us an amazing adult education class led by our own Jeff King. It was an amazing class on the correlations between modern psychology and scriptures. It was the highest attended adult ed class we have had since before Covid.

September was an amazing month for community connections. We renewed our relationship with Lowell Elementary school and are providing snacks for them again and hopefully some reading pals. We also brought back Toddler Time! We have seen such amazing relationships forming because of Toddler time, with families attending Toddler Time and then signing up for the music class that rents space at



St. James, or families from the music class signing up for the preschool that rents space and all coming to Toddler Time. Although Toddler Time is one of our gifts to our community, we have also seen families from Toddler Time attend our Sunday services.

We finished out 2023 with a beautiful season of Advent beginning with our fun Advent festival where many cookies were decorated, wreaths were made, and yummy soup and bread was consumed, a wonderful adult education class studying Christmas Hymns led by Kat Devanney, and ending with our traditional and moving Christmas Eve candlelight service.



I am so grateful for our amazing St. James community and wish you all many blessings in the new year.



January Godly Play Schedule

- January 7th Epiphany
- January 14th Parable of the Good Shepherd
- January 21st Parable of the Pearl
- January 28th Parable of the Mustard Seed

Sacred Encounters Women's Class

The class meets on January 30th at 10:30am. The title of the Lesson is "Mary and Martha Encounter Jesus", page 37. Here are some lines from a meditation I found in my recent reading which helped me focus on this lesson:

One Thing is Needful

We think there are a thousand things we should be concerned with, but there is actually only one. If we take care of that one thing, all others will find themselves done. So why are we so torn between matters of the heart and our worldly cares? From this day forward I resolve to give my total attention to the only thing on earth I ought to be concerned with. Illumined by God's holy light, I resolve to stop worrying and to do every moment, with all the strength of my mind and body, whatever God in his providence places in my path.

-Francois Fenelon, 1651 – 1715, Translated and modernized by Robert J. Edmonson in 1997

I look forward to seeing you and discussing our scripture together, Luke 10:38-42.

Faye Hill

ST. JAMES BOOK CLUB

St. James book club is currently reading *These Precious Days* by Ann Patchett, a series of essays where she “connects life and art as she illuminates what matters most.” We will meet the third Monday of January, January 15th at 7pm on zoom. Email tracy@saintjamespres for the zoom link.

MISSION & SOCIAL ACTION

Submitted by Maureen Kosa, Mission and Social Action chair



January Mission & Social Action Update

On Sunday, December 17, members of St. James met in the Horizons Room for some “fancy” hot cocoa and traveled to Gardenview Tiny Home Village to join with our choir for an hour of caroling at Gardenview. The Mission and Social Action team delivered 40 stockings for the residents. Thank you to all who participated in shopping for the stockings and for the assembling of the stockings after church. Thank you to the choir members and others who joined their beautiful voices to bring beauty and joy to the village.



Text or email me with any questions.

Maureen

Mission & Social Action News

Climate Action newsletter coming in the new year. Please read Ray Dellecker's take away from the COP28 United Nations Conference on Climate Action. If anyone has any poetry, articles, or book suggestions, please pass them on to Carla Shafer or Maureen Kosa.



By Ray Dellecker, Mission & Social Action Committee member

The 28th annual “Conference of the Parties” (COP28), sponsored by the United Nations recently adjourned after two weeks in Dubai. This conference is always contentious and always voluntary; agreements coming out of COP lack enforcement mechanisms and rely on unforced action taken by the signatories in the coming years.

The site itself of this year’s conference, the United Arab Emirates which is a major oil producing nation, was controversial. The meetings were attended and lobbied by a large number of fossil fuel companies and countries. In the end, however, after a great deal of negotiating between those wanting stronger action to reverse climate change and others wanting to preserve the status quo, at least three very significant and positive outcomes were agreed upon.

1. Methane, a very powerful climate change inducing pollutant, was central to the COP discussions. In the end, nations agreed to put more money behind pledges to reduce methane emissions, largely from natural gas leakage during its extraction and distribution. There should be some momentum in this area because reducing leakage would be a good business decision. Another major source of methane in the atmosphere comes from the raising of dairy cattle, and here there’s been less effective action. However, a number of large dairy companies including Nestle and Danone agreed to disclose their emissions and to begin taking action to reduce them by next year.

2. A fund was created into which the world’s major polluting countries agreed to contribute. This fund is intended to help undeveloped nations, much less responsible for global warming, protect themselves from rising seas and other climate impacts. It remains to be seen, of course, how much actual money flows into this Loss and Damage Fund.

3. Fossil fuels were identified explicitly as the culprit behind climate change, and the need to move away from them toward renewable energy sources was stated clearly in the final resolution coming out of COP28. Prior resolutions simply stated that the world needed to take swifter action against global warming without pointing at the burning of fossil fuels as the source of the problem.

So, on balance, there are reasons to be optimistic that the problem is agreed upon and action just may gain some traction.

ST. JAMES STAFF IS AT YOUR SERVICE

Pastor: The Rev. Seth J. Thomas, pastor@saintjamespres.org
 Children & Family Ministry Director: Tracy Caruso, tracy@saintjamespres.org
 Music Director: Ta Wei Tsai, music@saintjamespres.org
 Treasurer: Katie Dunne, stjamestreasurer.bham@gmail.com
 Administrative Ministry Assistant: Sharon King, office@saintjamespres.org

SESSION OF ST. JAMES

Tess Bowers
 Aaron Caruso
 Sarah Condrey
 Faye Hill (Clerk of Session)
 Maureen Kosa
 Andrew McLaurin
 Jimmy Parks
 Nebiyu Tesfa

DEACONS

Deacons Parish 1 – Merry Thomas*, Alice Bailey
 Deacons Parish 2 – Pam Gibson, Judy Buchan
 Deacons Parish 3 – Julie Keyes, Carla Shafer
 Deacons Parish 4 – Valerie McBeth, Claudia Allan
 Deacons Parish 5 – Pam Gibson, Adam Beaty
 Deacons Parish 6 – Kirsten Oliver, Amy Morriss*

* Deacon Co-Moderators

Worship Schedule - Online and In-Person, Sundays at 10:30 a.m.

Live streaming at:

<https://saintjamespres.org/live>
<https://www.facebook.com/saintjamespres/>

Church Office Hours:

9:00am - 2:00pm, Monday - Thursday



JANUARY BIRTHDAYS & ANNIVERSARIES

1/1	Teresa Bowers	🎂
1/2	Ed Simmers and Jane Madden	💕
1/5	Kat DeVaney	🎂
1/8	Marty Haines	🎂
1/11	Zach Engels	🎂
1/15	Karen Summers	🎂
1/15	Kyle Anderson	🎂
1/17	Dwayne Rogers	🎂
1/17	Sam King	🎂
1/18	Genevie Pfueller Roguski	🎂
1/23	Hailey Caruso	🎂
1/28	Tricia Bravener	🎂
1/31	Marlene Amman	🎂

PROGRAMS SHARING OUR FACILITY

AA Fairhaven Group
 AA Grateful Hearts Women's Group
 AA Men's Book Study Group
 AA SOS Men's Group
 Bayside Co-op Preschool
 Bellingham Community Chorus
 Bellingham Ukulele Group
 Boy Scouts Troop 7
 Happy Hour Al-Anon
 Liberation Yoga
 Linda's Tai Chi
 Little Sapling Music
 Overeaters Anonymous
 St. James Fitness
 The Table Church
 Whatcom Weavers Guild

Add your request to the St. James Prayer Chain
Contact your Deacon or St. James at:
360-733-1325 | office@saintjamespres.org



Deadlines for church publications
Weekly bulletin: Wednesday, 2:00pm
Weekly email: Thursday, 2:00pm
Monthly "the Pulse": the 25th, 2:00pm



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