

Evergreen

This morning, I stood under an immense Douglas Fir tree on the outskirts of Bellingham. I wandered through a labyrinth to its base and gazed at the gnarled bark and twisted branches, markings of age and growth. Scattered on the floor beneath the limbs were many fallen needles, cones, and brittle old pieces that had finally descended after their time of service. Though while the tree shows its great age (100s of years, I would assume), the signs of growth and tradition do not overpower the other prominent feature of this wonder — it is evergreen. While limbs crack, bark splits, wind rushes, and clears old parts, the tree remains green and renewing. Evergreen.

Being a native of the Pacific Northwest, I have grown up around these evergreen wonders, in many ways taking them for granted. As well, as a church kid, I have grown up around denominations and their structures. Their preexistence in my faith journey is akin to this tree — it has been around longer than I have and will likely outlive me. When I sit in a moment like this, I find myself drawn to appreciating those things I've taken for granted and considering why I strive to support and live within their predictable, steady foundation.

My entire life has been spent in the dual contexts of Presbyterianism and Cascadian Evergreens. These may seem contradictory settings, one contrived by human minds, the other an abiding natural presence that could only arise from the Body of God. But as I reflect upon the wisdom of the trees, with their deep roots and expansive arms, I can also witness the good news that arises from our denominational structures and their faithful presence in this region. Cascadia, the Evergreen region, and the hope for the church, with evergreen structures that can adapt, shed their brittle branches, and perpetually offer something Green to the world? This might be the Spirit's wind blowing through each.

I desire to see communities of faith, in this region and beyond, willing to lean upon the existing structures and supports — denominations and churches. This can sometimes lead to frustration, as some gnarly or brittle branches must be tended to. But these structures have also offered me and others profound love and guidance on seeking renewal and growth. In this desire, there is the recognition that we lean upon the Evergreen around us — we work together, look after one another, and seek individual and communal renewal. We keep participating in God's work of making us new, Evergreen.

In closing, I want to be very practical. It is a time for Evergreen work in our church and community. We can work together to pick up broken branches and clear space for adopting new programs and processes. St. James needs more folks to get involved with service before and after worship. We have ushering, security, tech, and music needs. Our committees, which organize and implement our activities and ministries, need your time, participation, insights, and gifts. Our mission partners and community groups need our presence and support.

How do we begin to recognize the Evergreen around us? Well, for me, it was getting close to a very big, very old tree and taking time to see it. How do we begin to engage with the needs of God's people and support the evergreening of our lives together? Well, come, get up close. Sign up for something or email the church office or me (pastor@saintjamespres.org) and ask where you can help. I praise God for all the Evergreen I see in this church. It is a joy to wander these forests of the Spirit with you. Grace and peace,

Pastor Seth



SESSION HIGHLIGHTS

submitted by Pastor Seth Thomas

This past month, Elders and Deacons of St. James gathered for lunch and their annual collaborative gathering.

Highlights from the Elder/Deacon Training on February 25, 2024

- Members of the St. James Deacons (Kirsten Oliver, Carla Shafer, Merry Thomas, and Pam Gibson) organized and served a meal of soup, salad, and bread.
- Pastor Seth led the group in some informal conversation exercises. He also reviewed a number of upcoming dates for this calendar year:
 - Vacation Bible School - June 24-27
 - Pastor's sabbatical - July 1 to October 1, 2024
 - Church Retreat at Warm Beach - September 6-8
- The group also discussed ongoing needs: sign ups for ushering and communion service are available on the bulletin board in the Horizon Room. We are in need of policy and procedures for church safety, as well as support in reviewing the Church policy manual as a whole.
- Rev. Janice Smith joined the training following lunch and led the group through a presentation on active, engaged listening skills, called "Listening is a Choice."
- Elders and Deacons then broke out to separate sessions to discuss the Book of Order's guidance on how to serve as an Elder and Deacon.



FINANCE UPDATE

submitted by Andrew McLaurin, Chair of Finance

Greetings. Thank you for your faithful giving to Saint James. We are beginning to settle into our normal patterns of giving. The finance committee is meeting on March 4th to review February financials. We anticipate a positive review.

I so appreciate the members of the committee. If you have the opportunity please express your appreciation to Lindsay Anderson, Pam Gibson, Ray Dellecker, Katie Dunne, Sharon King and Pastor Seth.

CHRISTIAN FAITH FORMATION

Submitted by Tracy Caruso, Children & Family Ministry Director,



Greetings from the Director of Children and Family Ministries!

It feels like we just started 2024 and yet spring and Easter are just around the corner!

February was a busy month as we prepared for and entered into Lent. As we have the past few years, St. James hosted the Ash Wednesday service, this year on Valentines Day, as part of our Lenten Pilgrimage with First Presbyterian and Cordata Presbyterian churches. We will continue our Lenten Pilgrimage with a Maundy Thursday service at Cordata Presbyterian and a Good Friday service at First Presbyterian. Both services will be held at 7:00 and childcare is provided.

We are began a new adult education class being led by Randy Pries titled: *Loving Well – The Gift of Presence In Everyday Conversations*. We know the importance and call to love others, but what does that practically look like in our everyday interactions with others? You might be surprised by how some basic conversation skills that are known but rarely used, can make such a loving impact on those around us: family, friends, and neighbors in our community. We hope you can join us for all of any of the final 3 classes, at 9am on Sunday mornings thru March 17th.

We had a fun pizza and movie night watching Barbie and enjoyed a great discussion after the film. We will be holding our annual potluck and BINGO night on Friday March 15th from 6-8pm. We hope you will come join us for a time of great food, fellowship, games, and prizes.

Our Godly Play class finished up our parable series and have moved on to our Faces of Easter and the Greatest Parable series for Lent. We are always in need of volunteers for both our Godly Play classroom and nursery. If you can help please let Tracy know.

We are preparing for Easter and the traditional Easter egg hunt. We are looking for donations of individually wrapped nut free candies to stuff Easter eggs with. Donations can be left in the office or given to Tracy. We need candy left no later than Friday March 29th.

We are already planning for our annual Vacation Bible School! This year we will be *Ascending the Alps: Finding God in the Mountains and Valleys*. VBS will be held June 24th thru June 27th from 9am-noon for children entering K thru 5th grade. Registration will open on April 1st. We are looking for volunteers to help us run this amazing event! Let Tracy know if you can help.

We continue to make connections with our neighborhood community with supporting Lowell Elementary school and with hosting Toddler Time. We are providing Lowell with snacks and reading mentors. Snacks can be brought to church any time and will be delivered monthly. If you are interested in becoming a reading mentor talk to Tracy. We continue to hold Toddler Time every Wednesday from 8:30-10:30 and have had a huge response this year. It is always so fun to see all the connections being made!

Godly Play schedule for March:

March 3rd The Greatest Parable Lesson 1

March 10th Faces of Easter Lessons 4,5, & 6

March 17th The Greatest Parable Lesson 2, 3, & 4

March 24th Palm Sunday

March 31st Faces of Easter 7

MISSION AND SOCIAL ACTION

Thank You: A Town Hall Recap from Interfaith Coalition

We would like to extend a warm note of gratitude to those of you who attended the Town Hall gatherings we held earlier this month. At these gatherings, we discussed our recent separation from Family Promise, our imminent sunset of our family housing program and possibilities for Interfaith Coalition's future in our community. Over 100 participants attended, including representatives from 30 member congregations and community partner organizations.

On Wednesday, February 7th, Cascadia Daily News published an article summarizing the content of the Town Hall gatherings, which is available at [this link](#). At the meetings, we discussed some of the organizational and societal factors that necessitated the decision for Interfaith Coalition to move on from directly providing housing. We have included more context here as a recap for those who were not able to attend.

Whatcom County has consistently had one of the [lowest apartment vacancy rates](#) in Washington State in the wake of [rising rents](#) and [low availability of affordable permanent housing](#); this has compounded the difficulty families in our time-limited housing programs have faced when looking to move on to permanent housing. We also discussed the effects of the substance use disorder crisis. Despite regular testing of our homes and an increase in our response time, we have struggled to stay ahead of the issue, primarily because we are not equipped to offer supportive programming for adults in our housing programs who are in the early days of recovery. With our homes as scattered as they are, we could support neither the expense nor the logistics of adding this programming to our existing offerings. After careful review, we recognized that providing housing was no longer a viable service model for Interfaith Coalition and our community.

As we look to ways Interfaith Coalition and our member congregations could serve our community beyond the sunset of our housing program, one possibility we have been discussing is creating a mobile services fair in which Interfaith Coalition staff and volunteers provide three core services; laundry, showers and a hot meal, with space for other organizations in the community to join in and offer services and resources on-site. This is a model that would meet tangible needs in the community, keep us nimble and allow us to work more closely with volunteers from member congregations. Additionally, we have enjoyed strong partnerships with the family liaisons at school districts all over Whatcom County, and we hope to leverage those partnerships to continue directly supporting families throughout our community.

While our next chapter is still in formation, we draw strength from our past as a coalition. Throughout our 43-year history in Whatcom County, we have shown resilience in the face of change; we have reimagined our mission, we have had to let go of parts of Interfaith Coalition we once held dear in order to welcome something new. And through it all, we have created a track record of responsiveness to the needs of our community. Our faith calls us to service, and it asks us to be steadfast as we draw on our capacity for reinvention.

Next month, our Board of Directors will initiate the strategic planning process at their annual board retreat. We gathered many useful comments and feedback from our supporters at the Town Hall gatherings last week, but I would like to underscore that we are still welcoming comments, questions and ideas from you - our member congregations and community partners.

Thank you for your active participation in this visioning process. We are grateful for your involvement in our mission, and we hope you will join us on our new path in the days ahead.

Yours in faith,

Devin Connolly

devin@interfaith-coalition.org

360-209-5322 (direct - call or text)

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

Ralph Buchan

Aaron Caruso

Sarah Condreay

Maureen Kosa

Andrew McLaurin

Casey Morriss

Jimmy Parks

Nebiyu Tesfa

Pastor Seth Thomas, Moderator



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

Pastor Seth's Office Hours: Tuesday - Thursday 10:00 am to 2:00 pm

To schedule ahead of time: <http://www.calendly.com/pastorseththomas>

or pastor@saintjamespres.org



MARCH BIRTHDAYS & ANNIVERSARIES

3/1	Gus Gustafson	
3/8	Martha Speer	
3/11	Stacy Thomas	
3/15	Shannon Parks-Beck	
3/18	Madeleine Smith	
3/21	Marion Dobbie	
3/21	Pam Gibson	
3/24	Zach Melrose	
3/25	Peter and Mary van der Veen	
3/27	Cindy Bauleke	
3/27	Donna Lane	
3/28	Mike Smith	
3/28	Margaret Humble	
3/30	Jim Kosa	

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
- Wild Hearts

PRAYER REQUESTS?

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