

St. James Parish

Epistle



February 2023

Rector's Message

*Tottering on another liturgical season ...
A season on the brink*

A number of years ago, well-known sports journalist John Feinstein was given unfettered access to legendary college coach Bobby Knight's basketball team and personal life. Knight was, at that time, at the very zenith of his coaching career at Indiana University. The previous season, the oft-volatile Knight famously threw a chair onto the court during a game against Purdue, a low point, and was suspended by the Big Ten. Feinstein wrote a best-selling book about Indiana's 1985-86 season called *A Season on the Brink*, the season before Indiana would win its third national title under Coach Knight. I am the son of a former college basketball coach, which some of you know, and was once a player (albeit a pretty mediocre one). My mind drifted to Feinstein's book as I thought about February, which will usher in Shrove Tuesday, Ash Wednesday, and the season of Lent.

We are, once again, facing Lent, the penultimate "season on the brink." What are we on the brink of, pray tell? Lent often feels like a Bobby Knight inspired basketball game turned liturgical season and we are that chair being thrown; God knows where. Lent doesn't always go down too well for us Christians; there are simply too many reminders – from the readings of scripture to the feel of the hymnody – of our own fallen sinfulness. Lent can take us, too, into all the unbidden struggles of life that can threaten our faith and sense of God's fairness or even to question God's existence.



Lent, however, is a time of true giftedness and promise. Lent invites us to once again go on the pilgrim road, to take the path less traveled, one of reflective prayer and hopeful introspection. The Lenten odyssey calls us to become mindful of our profound need for God's guidance. God's saving life and light in Christ is not a problem looking for a solution; rather it is a promise to be lived into. We are, indeed, on the brink of something, but not a bad thing or an unfortunate season of woe. Lent provides us a wonderful perspective from which to see God's promise for our lives. Lent taps into our need for God, yes, and may point us to a holiness that may be missing in our lives. Yet, at the same time, the season that leads us to Holy Week and the Passion of Christ means we are on the brink of God's final saving grace and mercy. Lent's readings and gravitas may toss us about on the waves of emotional challenge that facing our need for repentance may bring, but Lent also tells us, unequivocally, that Christ will not abandon us. So, may we keep a holy and sanctified Lent, leaning into our need for God and understanding that He will not leave us in our distress. The season of Lent has truly brought us to the brink of something profound, hopeful, and, in the end, redemptive.

In Christ,
Fr. George+

Church School update

We've begun the New Testament with the birth of Jesus, His circumcision, naming and dedication in the temple and His being lost then found in the temple teaching the elders. "Why were you looking for Me? Didn't you know that I would be in My Father's house ... that I would be about My Father's business?" His ministry of compassion begins with forgiving the sinful woman who washes His feet with her tears. Our children will learn how Jesus responds to people in their hurt and pain. Even in the middle of a huge crowd, He will turn His whole attention to one in great need who humbly comes to Him for help.



Church School begins prior to services at 10 o'clock with music and fellowship. Grades K-3 meet in the parish hall while grades 4-8 meet in the upstairs classroom. Each group has the same lesson which is presented in a manner appropriate for that age.

Church by the Pond

We have agreed to bring lunches on Saturday, February 4th, for Church by the Pond. St. James Parish will provide healthy lunches with a sandwich, fruit, etc., bottled water, and will be available to help distribute the lunches. Our plan is to have folks donate ham, turkey, cheese, and bread, chips, and bottled water. On the 4th at 10 am, volunteers will assemble in the parish kitchen to make the sandwiches and put the bag lunches together. At 2 pm St. James volunteers will meet at Bushnell Park to take part in a brief service of Holy Eucharist at which Fr. George will preside and deliver a short reflection. Following Holy Communion, our team of volunteers will distribute the lunches made that morning to the waiting folks. Church by the Pond is a wonderful opportunity for us to serve our neighbors, as Christ commanded, in a small but powerful way and to engage needy folks personally in surroundings that are familiar to them. Please join us in making lunches and/or sharing them with the homeless. For more information or questions, please contact Fr. George.

Ash Wednesday, February 22nd

It is important to say that ashes are not the focus of the Ash Wednesday service, which dates back to the early days of the church, though some of the things we do on the Wednesday before the first Sunday of Lent were once done on the Sunday itself. Wednesday became the beginning of Lent later on, so that Lent (not including Sundays) could be exactly 40 days. Ashes have figured into Christian practice since well before the 4th century; in fact, ashes go back to the times of pagan religions (Egypt and Greece), before the time of Christ, when ashes sprinkled on the head signified mourning. In most Catholic countries outside the United States and Africa, in fact, ashes are still sprinkled on the head on Ash Wednesday, instead of the priest making the sign of the cross on a person's forehead. Ancient Christians, as a practice, might be separated from his/her congregations because of "notorious sins." If the congregant wanted to come back into Christian community, he or she went through a process. They would, on more than one occasion, confess their sins publicly, and would lay prostrate on the floor, as a priest sprinkled ashes upon their head.

We tend to focus too much on ashes on the Wednesday that begins Lent. Actually, ashes are a sign of repentance, as



we understand that we have fallen away from the desires and design of God for our lives and wish to turn back to God. The priest says, as ashes are sprinkled on the head (or traced in the sign of the cross, more typical for us American Christians), "Remember you are dust, and to dust you shall return." Those words remind us that we bring nothing into the world and will take nothing from it but, whether we live or die, we belong to Almighty God.

We will have two Ash Wednesday services on February 22nd: one at noon and one at 7 pm, both with Holy Eucharist. The 7 o'clock service will be livestreamed. If you are not comfortable attending in-person worship, but would like to have ashes, you need only stop by the church 12 noon-5 pm. If you wish to have ashes and cannot make it to church, call Fr. George to schedule a very short visit for the imposition of ashes.

From the Deacon's bench

The Spirituality of Imperfection

Thomas Merton, the Trappist monk, loved to tell the story of his encounter with a Zen novice who had just finished his first year of living in a Buddhist monastery. Merton asked the novice what he had learned during the course of this first year. Merton expected to hear about encounters with enlightenment, discoveries of the spirit or, perhaps, even altered states of consciousness. But the novice replied that during his first year in the contemplative life he had simply learned to open and close doors.

"Learned to open and close doors." The quiet discipline of not acting impetuously, of not running around slamming doors, of not hurrying from one place to another was where this novice had to begin in the process of spiritual growth.

"Learned to open and close doors." Merton loved the answer, for to him it represented doing the ordinary, while being absorbed in it intensely and utterly.

I found this story retold in a book by Ernest Kurtz and Katherine Ketcham entitled *The Spirituality of Imperfection*. The authors warn that this book is not for those who expect an answer for every question, a solution for every problem and an end to every beginning. The book is a collection of stories and reflections that blend together "into a sort of symphony, a chorus of separate, distinct and sometimes off-key voices, harmonizing into a whole ... not perfect harmony, but harmony nonetheless.

The spirituality of imperfection speaks to those who seek meaning in the absurd, peace within chaos, light within darkness, joy within suffering – without denying the reality of absurdity, chaos, darkness and suffering. It's a spirituality for people who suffer from what the German's call *Zer-rissen-heit*, roughly translated as "torn-to-pieces-hood". Perhaps you've felt that way sometimes: divided, fractured, pulled in a dozen directions. Modern society encourages this fracturing of the self by suggesting that we can multitask. When my children were teenagers, I marveled at their ability to do homework, watch TV, and talk on the phone, all at the same time. They assured me that they could divide their attention between all of these tasks. I had my doubts. Current research has confirmed my suspicions. Your mind can really only focus on

one thing at a time. If you are engaged in more than one task, your mind jumps back and forth between them, not allowing you to give your full attention to anything. Perhaps we all could use some practice in learning to open and close doors. We all should pay more attention to the spiritual teaching "Do what you are doing." Often, we spend our time thinking about the past or planning for the future rather than living in the present.

I would never have bought a book with the title *The Spirituality of Imperfection* except that it came highly recommended by friend Jim. I had asked him for a book that described the spiritual aspects of recovery from addiction. Jim felt that this book best described the new spiritual life he had discovered in Alcoholics Anonymous. For years he had lived another life, numbed by the effects of drugs and alcohol. A life out of control, possessed, if you will, by an unclean spirit.

You all remember the miracle of Jesus healing of the daemonic, man possessed by a spirit. In this case, the spirit was unclean. By the time the New Testament was written, all the spirits were thought to be evil, even satanic. But in many cultures, past and present, you could also be possessed by a good spirit. I imagine that this is why we sometimes say that a happy person is "in good spirits". The Greeks used the word eudaemonic to describe a person who was living a good and virtuous life. Perhaps possession is not bad in itself. Rather it's the kind of spirits that possess you. So how do you encourage an in-dwelling of good spirits, healing the fractured soul, finding serenity. Certainly, the choices you make in your life have a direct impact on your sense of well-being. Many people strive to live out the philosophy found in the Serenity Prayer composed by Protestant theologian, Reinhold Neibuhr.

Here's the version he is said to have preferred.

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference. The struggle for me in living out this prayer has been the Wisdom to know the difference.

When facing a challenge in life, it's not so easy to determine whether change is possible.

Conventional wisdom often advises us to leave well enough alone. Many times, we believe the stereotypes we see on the evening news and

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assume that a certain group is beyond help, unreachable. It takes a special kind of courage to believe that change is possible when conventional wisdom says that it is not.

As Jesus' healing hands in the world today, it is the role of the church to heal people who feel torn to pieces. The church must urge all men and women to see themselves anew, to see themselves as God sees them. Healing occurs when we can see what God intended in us, the gifts God has given us and the beauty God sees in us. Instead of believing our lives will never change, let us hear the boast of the apostle Paul that in Christ we are a "new creation;" the "old has passed away;" behold, "everything has become new". The old, unclean spirits have been driven out and a new spirit, the holy spirit, dwells within us.

Doug Engwall, Deacon

Prayer Team

Well, here it is February already!! The month of February, with Valentine's Day a prominent focus, got me thinking about the theme of love. Not just romantic love or feeling-based love, but the kind of love that shows itself in action, the kind of love that sometimes shows up, not because of a feeling, but because of a decision to love. And I



thought of the familiar prayer attributed to St. Francis of Assisi. This is a prayer for all time, but perhaps more so now, than ever...

Prayer of St. Francis

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let me sow love;

where there is injury, pardon;

where there is doubt, faith;

where there is despair, hope;

where there is darkness, light;

where there is sadness, joy;

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much

seek to be consoled as to console;

to be understood as to understand;

to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive;

it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;

and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

AMEN!

Candlemas, the Feast of the Presentation of our Lord

On **Thursday, February 2nd, at 5 p.m.**, we will celebrate the Feast of the Presentation of our Lord in the Temple. The feast has been celebrated since at least the beginning of the 4th century, where it is referenced by bishops in sermons of the day that have survived. The feast is often called *Candlemas*, because light is an important part of the readings, and candles are often blessed and used at the service. In Luke 2:22-40, Mary and Joseph take the infant Jesus to the Temple, 40 days after His birth, so that Mary may be ritually purified. Jewish custom at the time was that women were ritually unclean after giving birth and would be purified 40 days after the birth.



The service traditionally begins with all processing with candles into the church together. **Parishioners are encouraged to bring candles that you might use in the coming year; they will be blessed during the service.** As we move through the season after Epiphany and await the beginning of Lent, recognizing and celebrating our Lord, who is the light of the world, seems a most fitting thing. We commemorate those who, though old, sick, in distress, living in poverty or physically ill are still able to recognize Jesus's power, divinity, and promise.

Discovering John's Gospel in Lent

During the Wednesdays of Lent at the church, beginning March 1st and spanning March 8th, 15th, 22nd and 29th, folks are invited to explore the dramatic elements in the Gospel according to John, how we make the text come alive.

Fr. George, who holds an MFA in Acting, will lead a dynamic study, in performance and word, on John's often ill-understood message. We will begin each evening at 6 pm with a light supper of soup and salad and from 6:30 to 7:45 engage a variety of John's texts, among them his account of the crucifixion. Sign up will be available soon. All are invited!

Celebrate our Sesquicentennial Year!

2023 ushers in a very special time in the life of our worshipping community: we commemorate 150 years of continuous worship as the community of St. James (from 1873) and nearly 125 years in our church building. St. James has been through many changes over its century and a half of existence and, like most churches in New England in 2023, we see more change in our future. Our hope is that we can energize our membership with different varieties of events over the course of 2023 and draw much positive and generous outside attention toward St. James, too. We invite all our members to engage in as many events over the course of the year as you possibly can. Your Vestry and 150th Planning Team invite your neighbors and friends to all our events over the course of our Sesquicentennial year. Let's get excited as we celebrate the first 150 years of our beloved St. James Parish!

Thank you for your participation, energy, hands, and feet to help, and for your patience, as the events of our 150th celebration fall into place.

Saturday, March 11, we will hold an art exposition and bidding auction in the parish hall. The artwork, some for sale and other pieces for exhibition only, will be set up in our hall. Hors d'oeuvres will be served, and music will be provided. Come for a relaxing evening to view and purchase art focusing on St. James and/or by St. James artists. All money raised will go toward our building fund for capital repairs and maintenance. Please hold the date and tell anyone that you feel might enjoy an evening of art, good food, and wine, and helping St. James move forward into its bright future.

On Sunday, April 23rd at 6:30 p.m., Anna Swinbourne, Executive Director of Hill-Stead Museum in Farmington, will offer a presentation on the breathtaking Isenheim Altarpiece. The program Anna will present will be part of our 150th Anniversary celebrations, but also our program year focus, the Christian Imagination.

During Eastertide our choir and guest musicians will offer a celebratory and joyous Choral Evensong, in commemoration of the Resurrection of our Lord. A reception will follow.



September 30th. We hope to hold a Block Party using our lawn and the Green between First Church and the Barney Library with live music at both venues, food trucks, games and other activities, and several fundraisers for St. James.

October 1st. We will have *Founders' Day* celebrating 150 years in the life of St. James.

December 16th. We hope to have an Ecumenical Christmas Walk to involve St. James, the Church of Saint Patrick, and First Church of Christ.

First Sunday Breakfast!

Find delicious food and fellowship at the First Sunday Breakfasts cooked by a great crew of men of the parish, led by John McBride: pancakes, waffles, sausage, bacon, eggs, breads, juice and coffee as good as Mom made. The menu may change from one month to the next. **Join us Sunday, February 5th for a wonderful time of food and fellowship!**



Celebrating February Birthdays

Foster White
Jeff Dugan
Donna Paye
Molly Greaves
Ethan Lucas
Charlotte Sullivan
Jamie Baldwin

Daniel Roberts
Siggi Ingimarson
Connor Hillemeir
Joyce Bettencourt
Marjorie Kin
Francesca Flynn
Marjorie Bingham



Shrove Tuesday Chili Cookoff

On Tuesday, February 21st, we once again make a call for chili as we hold our *Chili Cookoff* to say farewell to the season before Lent. Beginning at 5:30 pm on Tuesday, the 21st, we will offer a variety of chilis for the enjoyment of our parishioners and guests. **Anyone who is willing and able to make a chili (your favorite is wonderful!) and bring a pot for us to enjoy – or cornbread to complement the chili, please let the office know no later than Wednesday, February 15th.** We would love to have a variety of flavors represented, so some vegetarian, meat, spicy or mild, gluten-free, etc. would be lovely! Our special “judges” will make the rounds and pick a winner in a variety of categories, all in good fun. Around 6:30 pm, we will hold our brief service called *Farewell to Alleluias*, which is great for all, but especially our children, to usher in the season of Lent. We will, additionally, burn the old palms from last year on this night to create ashes, so please bring your leftover palms from last year, if you saved them. Join us for an evening of good food and fellowship!



Faith & Fries in the new year!

We usually gather on the 4th Tuesday of every month at **Five Corners Bistro & Craft Bar**, 354 Colt Hwy (Rt. 6) in Farmington. **We next convene on Tuesday, February 28th, from 7–8:30 pm.** You can come for dinner, have a drink or snack, whatever is comfortable for you. We invite all to come as they are able and please, feel free to invite a friend, neighbor, or co-worker to the conversation! Call the church with questions or more information on *Faith & Fries!*).



Your picture in a brochure or on our website?

St. James Parish uses candid photos of various church activities on our website and in publications (like this *Epistle*). If you prefer that your photo NOT be displayed, please contact the parish office; we maintain a list of members whose likeness is not to be shared.

Minutes of the Vestry of St. James: December 15, 2022

Present: Fr. George Roberts, EJ Ososki, Carol Kirkwood, Kim Faubert, Kathy Bullard, Tom Nelson, Maina Rice, Bob Sudell, Bonnie Sudell, Anna Whilby, Foster White, and Jim Wilkie.

Meeting called to order 7:04pm

Minutes of November 17, 2022, Vestry Meeting

Bob moved to accept the minutes as submitted. Seconded by Jim.

Discussion: correction to the 11/17/2022 minutes word misspelling change word “them to the” in sentence below.

Idea – to add into the Sunday service YouTube video link to donate to – the system able to provide for that. Many online services include such a link.

Motion made by Bob to accept minutes as amended, second by Bonnie

Unanimous vote to accept the minutes as amended.

Ministry Reports

Finance/Treasurer's report – November 2022

Summary of Report by EJ Ososki

- Our 2023 pledges are at \$274K. Consider aiming higher on the 2023 budget.
- Our total income is already higher than our budgeted amount for the entire year. This is a fantastic position to be.
- There are some expenses which are exceeding our budget. The bigger ones are nothing new and are related to insurance, heating oil, repairs, & snow removal. Total expenses compared to plan is \$314K vs. \$311K, respectively. Overall, we are performing favorable to our plan.

Motion made by Foster to accept the November financial report as submitted with a second by Anna.

Questions / Discussion

- Anna commented that it is nice to see we are doing pretty good.
- Some generous money has come in from non-pledgers. Fr. George stated that non-pledging money that can be credited to a person (i.e., check has a name on it), goes under pledge line item.

Unanimous vote to accept the November financial report as submitted.

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Outreach

- Meeting held after church on December 11, 2022, with sizable number of people in attendance. There is approximately \$8100 available. Decision was made to donate \$4,100 to local organizations and carry over approximately \$4,000 to 2023.
- When Outreach reconvenes, will be discussing how money to be spent, and what local, regional, and global involvement we will support. Outreach moving forward with people stepping up to provide leadership and re-establishing the committee to be more structured and engaged.

Dominican Republic (DR) quick report

- Fr. George and Chandler Howard going to the DR in January to see what Ministry projects are available for 2023 mission trip. They will meet with clergy from various parishes. Christy Wallace, Executive Director of Dominican Development Group will travel with Fr. George and Chandler. She will assist in looking at feasible projects.

Building and Grounds – report from Jim Wilkie

- Meeting held on December 13, 2022, with 8 in attendance. They have been meeting quarterly. Committee wants to be proactive to protect the church and building.
- There is a project list they are reviewing and prioritizing tasks that need to get done in near future.
- Looking at making 1 restroom more accessible, adding grab bars, maybe using current downstairs men's restroom to redesign as Unisex/Accessible restroom.
- Jim awaiting quote from Winterberry Gardens for landscaping upkeep.
- Reviewing antiquated smoke detector system.
- Consider replacing an incredibly old dishwasher with a better heavy-duty one.
- Have Eversource conduct a no cost energy audit – energy audits also required by Diocese.
- Best ways to protect cedar shingles.
- Doors to parking lot are rotting and rusting out. Explore possible automatic door opener.
- Parish Hall windows also need work.

New Business

Tentative 2023 Budget

- Of note – insurance rates are up. We are well insured with replacement insurance and insured as required by the Diocese.
- Increase for specific staff
- Bumped up heating costs and electric
- 5.7% pulled from invested which is like previous year and better than past years.
- Outreach 2% of budget
- Past years had a music fund currently \$3300 is in the fund. Consider using to fund a commissioned 150th choral work.
- January 2023 Vestry meeting will discuss and vote on final budget to be presented.

150th Anniversary

- Put in a budget line item for income/expenses related to the 150th events.
- 150th is a unique opportunity to share ourselves with the community and beyond. Goal to raise awareness of what St James has to offer.

Housing Allowance Resolution

- The following resolution presented by Carol Kirkwood, Clerk: *Resolution of the Vestry: Whereas the Rev. George Roberts is employed as a minister of the Gospel by St. James Episcopal Church, Farmington, CT, which although providing a residence for him does not provide the full cost of maintaining and furnishing such a residence, the Vestry resolves that of the total compensation of \$103,150 to be paid to the Rev. Roberts during 2023, that \$7,200 be designated a parsonage allowance within the meaning of that term as used in Section 107 of the IRS Code of 1986 as amended, but in any event until further notice the parsonage allowance shall be \$600.00 per month.*

Motion made by EJ to accept the resolution as stated above. Seconded by Kim.

Discussion / Questions – none

Unanimous vote to accept the resolution.

Kim made a motion to adjourn. Jim seconded.

Unanimous vote to adjourn.

Adjourned at 9:21pm

Respectfully Submitted

Carol

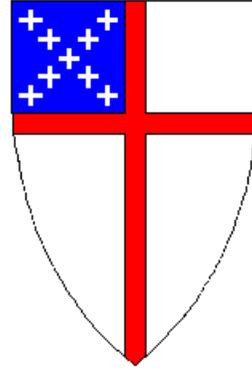
Carol Kirkwood, Clerk

St. James Parish

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MISSION STATEMENT:

*We welcome all to worship and nurture spiritual growth through faith, grace and reason.
We reach out to those in need as a caring community
and live Christ's teaching to love one another.*

STAFF		OFFICERS		
The Rev. George C. Roberts	<i>Rector</i>	Kim Faubert & Anna Whilby, <i>Wardens</i>		
The Rev. Douglas Engwall	<i>Deacon</i>	** EJ Ososki, <i>Treasurer</i>		
Blake Hansen	<i>Director of Music</i>	** Jerry Hess, <i>Asst. Treasurer</i>		
Susan Deming	<i>Parish Administrator</i>	** Carol Kirkwood, <i>Parish Clerk</i>		
Anthony Nauss	<i>Sexton</i>			
Laura Vacca	<i>Nursery Supervisor</i>			
		2023	VESTRY	2025
		Kim Faubert	Kathy Bullard	** Mary Lansing
		Maina Rice	Bonnie Sudell	** Skip Mason
		Anna Whilby	Robert Sudell	** Kim Pereira
		** to be voted on at Annual Meeting 1/29/23		

St. James Parish

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ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

