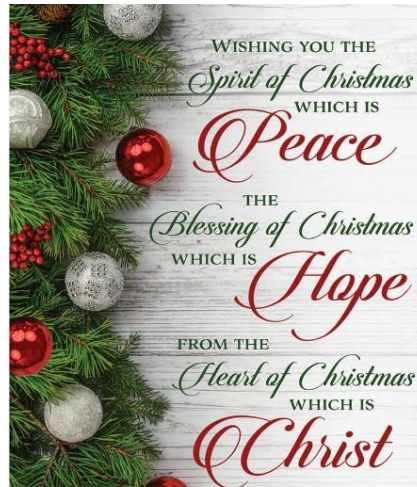


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December 2022

Dear members and friends of Christ Church,

We live in a nation where the Church as an institution is in a precarious place. Before the Enlightenment, it was difficult to even conceive of a world without spiritual beings, and belonging to the Church was inherently preferable to being subject to wicked spiritual forces. During the post-WWII baby boom, being a member of a church was part of one's duty, if not necessarily to God than to one's country and the values for which it stood (in opposition to the Soviet Union). Today, neither belief nor duty compel many folks (at least those my age and younger) to join any institution; in the contemporary quest for relevance (does this speak to my concerns?) and authenticity (do their words match both their actions and the truth as I understand it?), the Church has often been found wanting.

While there is no cure-all solution that would allow the institution to recover by uniformly increasing attendance, there are ways that we as present members of the Church can help translate our belief and sense of duty for those seeking relevance and authenticity. One way is our understanding of ministry; I often say that God is love, God calls us to love God and each other, and so our actions must be rooted in love. Another way to think of that is to say that God is a minister (someone who helps others, if not materially than as a comforting presence) and we are called to minister to those around us (if nothing else, by patiently listening so they do not feel invisible). If we understand our call as ministering to others because God ministers to us, and we can say that to others, then we can go a long way toward being relevant in the lives of our non-churchgoing neighbors in a world where most interactions are transactional and not ministerial.

Another method of translation is storytelling, not only listening (as ministers) to the stories of others but sharing our own. Even those who have rejected or never been members of the institutional Church have some experience of what it is to be spiritually energized (or alive, or engaged, or other such synonyms). When we are able and willing to tell others (in the context of a comfortable conversation, not as an aggressive opener) about when we felt our spirits energized (in a church service, or during a ministry of the church, or as a result of our attendance at church), that story can go a long way toward establishing the authenticity of our church membership, and thus increasing the possibility that an invitation we extend to the church might be accepted.

As we approach Christmas (the time when the Church comes closest to resuming its former place as a highly visible institution incorporating most Americans), this can be an excellent opportunity for us to recognize that we will seem relevant and authentic not by radically changing how we worship or preaching a gospel that conforms to nationalist expectations, but by freshly understanding the relationship between God's ministry and ours and by sharing stories of the spiritual energy we have felt and want others to experience. To that end, as you look through this newsletter I particularly encourage you to read Br. Mychal Joseph's account of the homeless ministry we have begun at Christ Church.

Advent Blessings,
Fr. John

Weekday Homeless Ministry

At the request of Fr. John, Br. Mychal Joseph Gallop has been ministering to the homeless of Martinsville-Henry County with a drop-in ministry in our Undercroft four days a week (Monday through Thursday, 8:30-3:30). What started as a short-term experiment is evolving into an ongoing ministry of the Christ Church. In the following, Mychal Joseph explains what he's been doing, why this ministry is important, and how other members of the church can support it.

The homeless are often treated as lepers; people avoid them as though homelessness is a contagious disease. When you're homeless, as I was many years ago, you can begin to think of yourself as subhuman, a stain on society without whom the world would be better off. It becomes very difficult to continue justifying the struggle when you don't feel you deserve to survive.

When volunteering at the Warming Center last winter, I began ministering to our clients as a friend hanging out with other friends: sitting and listening to their stories, playing chess together, or simply being present over a cup of coffee. I wasn't trying to solve their homelessness or behaving as though there was a vast gulf between their humanity and mine. Although there are many services in our community that address the physical needs of the homeless, no organization exists solely for the purpose of addressing this spiritual need, making each individual feel that they are fully human, a beloved child of God.

Over the past several months, I've spent around seven hours a day, four days a week in the Undercroft. I keep a pot of coffee hot for visitors and have some food to share as well. Thanks to the generosity of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, I have food, clothing, blankets, and more that I can distribute as needed. The chapel is open for prayer and reflection, and I have consecrated wafers so I can offer Communion to those wanting such spiritual food. All of this helps create a safe space in which we can talk and see each other as equals, in the hope of extending to the least of these the same compassion and understanding that Christ Church extended to me and my family.

I invite you to join me in this ministry with your prayers and presence. While I certainly will not refuse donations of food (non-perishable items that don't require preparation) or other supplies, I especially ask you to pray for me and those to whom I minister, and I invite you to join me in the Undercroft to meet those who are experiencing homelessness. While they may look scary, they are our siblings. Most are dealing with years of painful trauma, many have addictions and mental health issues, and they may be timid and feel out of place thanks to years of rejection. Whether you can volunteer to join me on a regular basis or just drop in while running other errands, I will gladly introduce them to you, that the welcoming and healing love of Christ may transform us all.

With love,

Br. Mychal Joseph Gallop n/BSG

✝ Soli Deo Gloria ✝

2022 Angel Tree Ministry

We have already received \$1,725 towards our goal. Thank you to everyone that has donated. This will sponsor 69 children for this year's Prison Angel Tree Ministry, which provides Christmas presents for children of incarcerated parents. Our goal is to collect \$25 for each of 150 children (or **\$3,750 total**). **We are \$2,025 short of our goal for this year. The deadline to receive payments is Monday, December 12th. Please include "Angel Tree" in the memo of any checks.** In 2021 we collected funds to give 280 children a Christmas gift.

Christmas Poinsettia Memorials

If you wish to give Christmas flowers for the decoration of the Church as a memorial or in thanksgiving, please complete the **attached form or the red form in the racks in the Narthex** and mail it to the church office, put it through the Church office mail slot or place it in the collection plate along with your check.

Checks should be made payable to Christ Episcopal Church, clearly noted "Christmas Flowers," and the cost is \$11.50 each, for each person or couple honored or memorialized.

ALL orders are due in the Church office no later than Thursday, December 15th.

2023 Pledges

To this point, we have received 36 pledges totaling \$118,595 for 2023, compared to 67 for \$231,835 for 2022. If you've not yet done so, we ask that you take some time to pray about your giving to Christ Church next year and submit your pledge as soon as possible. Pledge cards are available from the office.

End-of-year Giving

December 29th is the deadline for the Office to receive financial gifts that will appear on your 2022 giving statements. In addition to gifts toward your 2022 pledges and other gifts toward the general operating budget, we would also gladly receive gifts designated for the upcoming replacement of the Parish House roof. Deborah must receive requests for any gifts in the form of stock transfers by December 27th.

Oyster Roast 2022

For our Oyster Roast on Nov. 4, we hoped to raise a net of \$10,000 to support our 2022 budget; we raised \$12,955! Many thanks to Page Beeler for her hard work in organizing the event, and to everyone who helped make it such a success.

Concert for the Human Family

You're invited to a special holiday concert tour, offered by the Episcopal Church, that **celebrates conversation across differences and reconciliation** with the goal of bringing folks together from all walks of life around a common purpose to share and celebrate music and the message of togetherness. **All are welcome!** Join GRAMMY-nominated piano duo Kory and Keith Caudill, GRAMMY award winning drummer, vocalist, and recording artist Marcus Finnie, and Wordsmith for genre-crossing original music that bridges jazz, hip-hop, rock, bluegrass, and storytelling along the way. The concert will play at Christ Church, Roanoke, on Friday, December 9 and at St. John's, Lynchburg, on Saturday December 10; tickets are available from https://myemail.constantcontact.com/Holiday-Concert-for-the-Human-Family-.html?soid=1101622110977&aid=4rfmXJLJs_k

Public Theology – December 14

Public Theology meets on Wednesday, December 14, at Mountain Valley Brewing (4220 Mountain Valley Rd, Axton). Dr. Eric Vanden Eykel will join Pastor Daniel in discussing who the Magi were, what role they play in the Bible, and why we still talk about them today. We begin with socializing and food around 6:00, with the discussion going from 7:00 to 8:00.

Christmas & New Year's Office Hours

The Church office will be closed from Thursday, December 22 thru Wednesday, December 28 as Deborah will be on vacation. Fr. John will be on vacation from Monday, December 26 thru Saturday, December 31. The office will be closed Monday, January 2, in observance of New Year's.

Christmas Services

Christ Church will be celebrating our festive Holy Eucharist (including singing Silent Night by candlelight) at 5:30 pm on Saturday, December 24, along with a smaller service (featuring carols led by Will Zimmer) at 10:30 am on Sunday, December 25.

Vestry Elections

At our Annual Meeting on November 13, four were nominated and elected to serve three-year terms on Vestry: Pat Bondurant, Betty Budde, Natalie Coleman, and Will Zimmer. They join continuing members Hank Long, Ruby Stultz, Rebin Titus, Pat Walmsley (with terms expiring at the end of 2023), Ben Beeler, Jay Dickens, Beverly Lyle, and Andy Williams (terms expiring 2024). We are grateful for the service of Carolyn Byrd, Beverley Coleman, Cece Johnson, and Ellen Maxwell, whose terms ran from January 2020 through this December.

Nursery

If you are the parent or guardian of a young child and would attend Sunday services if the nursery were staffed again, please let us know (276-632-2896 or office@christchurchmvl.org).

St. Nicholas Day Appeal

A Message from Bishop Mark A. Bourlakas: As we enter into Advent, one of the holiest seasons of the Christian year, our diocese's annual St. Nicholas Day Appeal is one significant way that we can focus on the mission of love that the Son of God ushers into our world. This year, your donations will aid Grace House on the Mountain in its mission to serve and support neighbors in Appalachia. Donations will go towards the Grace House Outreach Fund, which provides for a variety of medical, utility, food, and clothing expenses, as well as to support work projects in the community. In the wake of this summer's devastating floods in Southwestern Virginia, the Outreach Fund was used heavily to provide flood relief and the number of work project needs in the area has increased. Please consider faithfully how you might support this effort, either by donating online at www.dioswva.org or by mailing a check payable to the Episcopal Diocese of Southwestern Virginia with "St. Nicholas Day Appeal" marked in the memo to PO Box 2279, Roanoke, VA 24009. It is a charitable love for the neighbor that is honored in St. Nicholas, and this annual appeal allows us to share with others in this season of giving.

Grace Network - Our Grace Network Assignments for December: Pork & Beans 15 oz. For the month of December: **dish detergent, deodorant and laundry detergent.** As a Church family, we have committed to helping Grace Network with stocking their food pantry for those in need. Please remember to pick up our assigned item the next time you visit the grocery store. You can bring your items to the Church office OR put them in the little red wagon in the Narthex.

Winter Weather Policy

When we experience inclement winter weather on a Sunday morning, there will still be a 10:30 worship service in the church, but Fr. John encourages you to stay home if you feel you cannot arrive in safety, even if you are scheduled to serve. During the week, if Martinsville Public Schools are closed, the Office will also be closed.