



The St. Stephen's Clarion

Priest's Passages

Dear Ones,

As Advent gently holds us, and our preparation time for the coming of *God With Us* deepens, we anticipate the wonder of the Christ child in the manger and the second coming of our Lord – and feel many emotions.

For some, these weeks prior to Christmas are filled with (often unintended) busyness such as shopping, Christmas parties, programs, baking, and perhaps even preparing for a trip, or for visitors who will be with us during the holidays. For many, it is business as usual, punctuated with the odd candy cane. For others, it is a time to remember past Christmases – the love, warmth, family traditions and celebrations.

However, Christmas and the days leading up to it are often taxing emotionally, and so the holidays doesn't always bring out happiness and warmth. If we have experienced losses, loneliness, or emotional pain, Christmas can be an especially difficult time of the year. It's important that we not feel isolated or excluded from the seasonal traditions when we feel this way. Rather, Advent brings us opportunities for meditation and centering which can bring deep understanding in a hectic and emotional time. Additionally, we care even more deeply for each other during this time, making sure that those who live alone have company or are included if they want that.

Glancing through my regular weekly e-mails, I'm thankful for the variety of offerings that are available to us in which the means to a holy Advent are offered. These are but a few. If you know of others, please let me know so we can share them with everyone. As always, I am available to talk-

A blessed Advent-
Rilla+

Blue Christmas Services

For people who have experienced personal loss or difficult circumstances in life, the Christmas time can be very challenging. While most folks are celebrating the season, people experience grief and loss (of loved ones, careers, health or former relationships)

*At St. Stephen's,
our Mission is to
worship, love and
serve Our Lord
Jesus Christ,
welcoming
everyone,
deepening our
faith, helping our
neighbors and
caring for creation*

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Priest's Passages (Continued)

need a way to both honor/recognize their loss or challenge while also noting the quiet hope of Christ born on Earth. A number of different services listed below will provide a Christmas worship service that is quietly reflective, with the opportunity for those who attend to formally remember those they have lost. Come to the quiet of the manger, the place where Divine Peace is born.

St. Mark's Cathedral
1245 Tenth Avenue East, Seattle
Thursday, December 20 – 7:00 PM – Thomsen Chapel
All are welcome.

Trinity Episcopal Church
“A Quiet Christmas Service for those experiencing grief or personal challenges at the holidays.”
2301 Hoyt Ave, Everett
Friday, December 21 – 7:00 PM

St. Paul's Episcopal Church,
“Longest Night Service”
2117 Walnut Street
Bellingham, Washington
Thursday, December 20, 5:30 PM

Advent Taize Service –
St. Stephen's, Oak Harbor
December 6, 2018 7:00

The National Cathedral in Washington, D.C. has a website worth visiting, especially during Advent. Daily Advent meditations and special worship experiences may lead us to quiet, contemplative, and often healing experiences during this time of waiting. Link below:
<http://links.nationalcathedral.mkt4852.com/servlet/MailView?ms=MjA2NDM1OTAS1&r=NDE1Mjg5MDczNzE5So&j=MTM4MTk5NzUoNQS2&mt=1&rt=0>

Hey, Bill, Tell Us Something Cool!

I have just listened to the Bishop's Advent video message and it is typically good, valuable in our faithful journey. If you have not seen it, I would urge you to do so. It is or will soon be posted on the diocesan website. [ecww.org]

The Bishop describes the season of Advent as a time of anticipation, preparation and expectation. These themes are typically associated with the coming of the birth of Jesus, the expectation that the Risen Jesus will come again, and with the experience of Mary in her surprising and well-accepted pregnancy.



For my part, it is the waiting that interests me.

Waiting is one of the activities that seems to characterize my life. Over time, I have developed a certain level of skill at this social practice, a skill that is recognized by some friends at St. Stephen's as coffee hour lingers on. I'll not explore this experience in detail but simply report that this has become a spiritual practice for me, increasingly valuable in my faith development. What I like best about waiting is the quiet.

As some of you know, I taught at the Episcopal Seminary of the Southwest in Austin TX for a good long while. In the later years of my service there, the tempo of life on the campus became more and more frenetic, more and more things to do—good things, mind you, but way too many, and committee meetings and conferences with students and colleagues and on and on. I finally reached the point where I simply had to do something, at least for myself, if not for everyone else.

So, I began the practice of doing nothing, in public. There were a number of benches distributed around the seminary campus, typically associated with a walkway or passage. I began to seat myself on a bench, of an afternoon, and do nothing. Just sit there. Someone, perhaps a student, would approach me, stop next to me and ask what I was doing. "Nothing," I would say, "Care to join me?" I would always make sure that I sat on the bench so that someone else could sit alongside.

Not always or even often, but sometimes someone would join me on the bench and together, we would do nothing in public. Quiet—we did not talk—settled, vigilant I suppose, but mostly quiet.

I see this "doing nothing" as my take on the practice of waiting. My spiritual practice of doing nothing was sufficiently memorable for one of my students to write a story about it for Huffington Post. And, when I retired, a bench was purchased in my honor and memory, and inscribed with my name, along with a blessing I had written and used at the Seminary. It sits by the chapel door.

I would commend this practice to you as part of your Advent life. Quiet. Doing nothing. Waiting, not impatiently but quietly, alert in some measure, but not in a stir, confident that there is time, time enough for waiting.

Benedicite!

Deacon's Corner

I've just got to have it no matter what!



Addiction is something that most of us have made an acquaintance with, somehow, somewhere in our lives. Objects of abuse or misuse, substances or behaviors, have found their way into lives of friends, relatives or ourselves, who have been caught up in the three C's that are now the informal hallmark of addiction: craving for the object of addiction, loss of control over the use of the object of addiction and continued engagement with the object of addiction despite adverse consequences.

People see addiction as a problem of personal weakness and moral failure on the part of the person so affected. Misusers are hidden, condemned and ostracized. Society's answer is to treat many of these people in the two most expensive venues, the emergency room and criminal justice system we have available to us.

The medical and scientific community are shifting away from a punitive answer toward a wellness answer. We tried prohibition of intoxicants with the XVIII Amendment and not only are we living with the criminal fallout from banning alcohol but continued alcohol misuse. According to the World Health Organization alcohol caused more than 5% of the global disease burden and contributed to 3 million death in 2016. Well behind alcohol, but gaining, is the misuse of drugs - especially opioids of all kinds. From prescriptions like codeine, hydrocodone and oxycodone through to morphine and fentanyl, to the illegals like heroin and fentanyl analogues, which are much more powerful than morphine, heroin or schedule 2 fentanyl. Heroin can be fatal at 30 mg while fentanyl is fatal at 3 mg — the difference in volume between a quarter teaspoon and a few grains of table salt.

Vancouver and the Province of British Columbia are ground zero for Canada's growing fentanyl problem. In 2017 there were 1449 deaths from drug overdose, 80% involved fentanyl and only 17 of the victims were homeless. The typical death is a working young to middle age male who is home and alone. This is a major cause of death, along with suicide and alcoholism, among males in both the United States and Canada and contributes to the declining life expectancy.

The research and science are showing that there are ways of countering the misuse syndromes that are out there. They are also showing that there is, like objects of misuse, no one answer. Overcoming addiction can be a long, slow, painful, and often complicated process. But contrary to popular belief, you don't always need to go to a rehabilitation center or receive formal treatment to overcome addiction.

Many people recover from addiction on their own. Others do it with the help of peers, 12-step programs, psychotherapy, medications, outpatient or inpatient treatment centers, or a combination of these elements.

Deacon's Corner (Continued)

But there are two overarching lifestyle changes that can assist most successful paths to recovery, if you are able to do them. One is re-engaging in something that gives one meaning in life and breaks the relationship with the object of misuse. Possibly reengaging with something that gave you meaning before addiction entered your life. Second is to start exercising. Exercise has been found to be a natural antidepressant, relives stress and clears the thinking. Exercise also prompts the body to release its own psychoactive substances, so get up and take a walk. Is it easy? No. Will there be temptations, backsliding and possibly hopping to other objects of abuse? Yes. But it has been done and you can do it.

The question becomes; Is what we are doing working? Or, is it an expensive exercise in judgmental thinking that has led to broken families, full prisons, politically destabilized countries and hundreds of thousands of dead from all forms of drug wars and wars on drugs? It is within the relationships we build and allow to be built in community that allow people to overcome addiction. It is not in the shaming, guilt, ostracizing and criminalizing those who are on the margins because of addiction. Change is hard, but it is doable. Are we addicted to the rewards that come from what we have always done? We are called to love our neighbor, but the hardest part of that command is to totally love and trust God and yourself. Overcoming addiction belongs in the house of medicine with as much societal support as any other disease process.

Let us talk,
Dennis



Birthdays & Anniversaries

December Birthdays

- Dec. 3: The Rev. Tom Sinning
- Dec. 5: John Visick
- Dec. 17: Jared Chapman
- Dec. 19: David Parker
- Dec. 18: The Rev. Diana Peters
- Dec. 20: Barbara Forbes
- Dec. 20: Vincent Ho

Ordination Anniversary

- Dec. 21, 1996: The Rev. Diana Peters

December Anniversaries

- Dec. 16: Grant & Jody Heiken
- Dec. 18: The Rt. Rev Sanford & Mari Hampton



Senior Warden's Words—Harry Anderson

This season of Advent we have entered is about wondering. Wondering in amazement at how God took the form of our flesh in order to teach us about the righteousness of God's kingdom. And also wondering how the miracles in our own lives seem to take place often without notice, without anticipation, sometimes without even asking for them.



As I take time to wonder about these things, I am also struck in wonderment about how things just seem to happen at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church. To me, it's nothing short of miraculous. Consider this:

- Every Sunday after worship, we enjoy a warm time of fellowship with a loaded table of goodies to eat. Who brings all the food? Who makes the coffee? Do you know? Who sets up the tables and brings out the plates and utensils? Have you asked? Who's still in the kitchen washing dishes after the rest of us have left? Who checks to make sure all doors are shut and locked at the end of the day? Any idea?
- Before worship, the altar table is dressed with fresh linen. The bread and wine put out. Candles are placed and lit. The lights and sound system are turned on. The furnace thermostat is set. Who's doing all this? "The Altar Guild!" you say. But who are these angels on the Altar Guild? Do you know?
- The list of deferred maintenance items we identified is shrinking rapidly. Who's doing all that work? "The Junior Warden, isn't it?" you say. Yes, our hardworking Junior Warden Rick Colombo has been in charge. But who are all the helpers he has organized? Any guesses?
- Our bathrooms are clean and our halls are vacuumed. Who does that? (Hint: it's a local service that donates its time as an offering to the church; we pay them nothing.)

I could go on but you get the idea.

- Our Sunday bulletin is always nicely printed and ready for us on Sunday mornings. Who makes sure it's on time and done right? Any guesses?
- Our website is beautiful and up to date; our weekly email and monthly newsletter are always out on time and packed with our St. Stephen's goings-on. Who puts in the hours to make that happen? Do you know?

Senior Warden's Words (Continued)

- Our bills are paid on time, our books are carefully maintained and financial records pass an audit every year. How does all that happen? Who puts in the endless hours to make sure our church "business" runs properly? Got any ideas?

I could go on but you get the idea. St. Stephen's is a church that runs on radical welcome, faith and generosity – endless, unpaid volunteer hours. When I put names to answer all the questions I posed above, I come up with about a dozen or so names. Not that many considering how much work gets done.

It's my hope in the years ahead, as we continue to grow as a parish, that our band of angels who do so much for all of us will also grow. Next time you see someone doing some work for us at church, please say thanks – and ask them how you can help.

Outreach

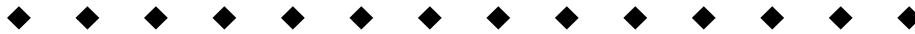


It is already December, and St. Stephen's is in the midst of year end outreach. The outreach committee will meet soon to make decisions where our budgeted outreach will go this month. However, you can be involved in many ways. First of all, there is the small tree on the outreach table. This is to collect money to go toward buying gift cards for Christmas for all teenagers in foster care on the island. The idea is that you take a red envelope off the tree, place your check (this will appear on your year end giving statement) or cash into the envelope and then put it in the red basket under the tree. Now, choose an angel from the larger basket and place it on the tree. Another great opportunity for spreading the joy of the season is with a new pair of socks, or a warm hat, or cozy mittens or gloves. These will be collected at the Christmas sing-along on Thursday, December 20th, from 5:30 to 8:00 pm. Then they will be delivered to the Haven, our overnight shelter in Oak Harbor. If you cannot attend the sing-along, please just put them in the basket marked "Haven". And, of course, we will collect food for Help House, our food bank in Oak Harbor. Let's fill up that wagon to overflowing.

Upcoming Events

The Adult Formation Schedule

- ◆ Dec. 9 – Paul’s Letter to the Philippians for Advent Part 2-Tom Johnson
- ◆ Dec. 16 – Paul’s Letter to the Philippians for Advent – Part 3
- ◆ Dec. 23 - *No class*
- ◆ Dec. 30 - *No class*



Thursday, December 6th at 7:00 pm

You and your family are cordially invited to join us for a special

Advent Taizé Service

Prayers, silent meditation, psalms, singing, Scripture and other readings.

Remember to invite your friends to join us for this non-denominational service.



St. Stephen’s Episcopal Church Our Fourth Annual Whidbey Community Christmas Sing-Along

Thursday, December 20
5:30 pm – 8:00 pm

We will sing popular secular holiday tunes like “Jingle Bells” and “Deck the Hall” followed by beloved Christmas carols from “Silent Night” to “Joy to the World.”

No singing talent required! Lyrics provided! Children are welcome! Bring your friends!

Please bring a favorite Christmas treat to share. Beverages will be provided.

We will also gather gifts for the less fortunate in our community—please donate socks, mittens and gloves as you are able.

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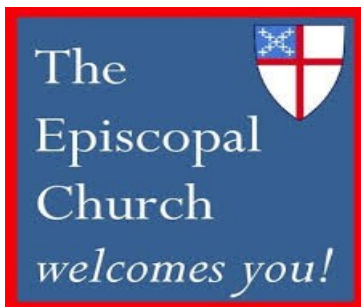
Calendar of Upcoming Events:

- ◆ Thursday Dec. 6 7:00pm Taizé Service
- ◆ Sunday Dec. 9 *Coffee Hour* Election of Vestry Members for 2019
- ◆ Thursday Dec. 20 5:30-8:00pm Christmas Sing-Along

Continuing Events

- ◆ Tuesdays & Thursdays: 10:00 am Morning Prayer
- ◆ Sundays: 10:30 am Holy Eucharist & Sunday School
Nursery Care Available

If you have information or any fun photos you would like included, in the monthly newsletter, please contact Cindy Geibig at cindynkilo@yahoo.com.



Wherever you are in your life with God -- whether a hesitant searcher or a regular churchgoer -- we invite you to worship with us and to think of St. Stephen's as your spiritual home.

We meet in the Main Sanctuary for Eucharist at 10:30 AM each Sunday, followed by fellowship in Miller Hall. Our office is in the A-frame building with All Saints Chapel.