



The First Order

St. Stephen's Parish

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JANUARY 2020

From our Interim Rector

I hope you had a blessed Christmas and the new year is greeting you with a sense of hope. By the time you read this, many of us will have taken down the tree, packed up the decorations and put away or exchanged gifts. We have moved to the post-Christmas phase of life. Some of us hold the Christmas celebration a bit longer, at least through Epiphany, but much of the world around us has moved on.

There is much tumult around the world and in our Nation. The economic prosperity many have experienced during these past few years has not translated into a general sense of wellbeing and inner peace. Many, many have been left out of these "prosperous" times as we witness on a daily basis at St. Stephen's. The work of Christmas does not end on the evening of December 25th; it calls to us each day, every day of our lives.

The Rev. Howard Thurman, a twentieth century author, philosopher, theologian,

educator and civil rights leader, wrote the following poem inviting us to do "The Work of Christmas."

When the song of the angels is stilled,
when the star in the sky is gone,
when the kings and princes are home,
when the shepherds are back with their flocks,
the work of Christmas begins:

to find the lost,
to heal the broken,
to feed the hungry,
to release the prisoner,
to rebuild the nations,
to bring peace among the people,
to make music in the heart.

May 2020 find us committed to Emmanuel, "God with us" as we live more deeply the work of Christmas through the people we touch, the lives we live, and the dreams we hold.

John Tarrant

Planning Meeting for Spring 2020 Men's Retreat

A group is gathering on Wednesday, January 15, at 7:00 p.m. at the church to start preliminary plans for a potential spring 2020 men's retreat. All men interested in helping out are invited! If you're interested in helping plan the retreat but can't attend the meeting, please contact Craig Reynolds at cmreyn@gmail.com or 413.822.0248. Thank you!

Annual Meeting

The Annual Meeting will be held after the 10:00 a.m. service on January 26th. Should there be snow that Sunday, the rain date (guess that should read 'snow date') will be February 2nd.

This is an important meeting, one that you should regard as seriously as you do voting in local and national elections. Vestry members are chosen, the Budget is presented and there are any number of other items addressed. Your voice should be heard, either literally or by your vote. Please mark your calendar and attend.

From the Desk(s) of your Profile Committee

Back in September, as St. Stephen's began its formal search process for a new rector, we teamed with Holy Cow! Consulting, out of Ohio, under the advisement of Rich Simpson, Canon to the Ordinary in the Episcopal Diocese of Western Massachusetts. Rich serves on Bishop Doug Fisher's executive team and his primary work in this role is to support clergy and congregations during times of clergy transitions. The main reason Rich put us in touch with Holy Cow! Consulting was so we could benefit from one of their most useful tools, a survey referred to as the Congregation Assessment Tool or CAT.

Just as our committee was being born, with the selection of its first two "official" members, Maribeth Barney as chairperson, and Chris Plankey as vestry liaison to that committee, its first major task revealed itself. We were responsible for researching and familiarizing ourselves with the CAT survey, then ordering and administering it. Early on, the work was to sift through the many options available when ordering a CAT survey, and raising awareness within the parish about the survey. Frequent announcements and the arrival of "Gertrude," a fiberglass cow who joined us for weeks, all marked our goal of maximizing participation in the CAT survey. And lo!, Gertrude's stay was not in vain. St. Stephen's achieved a remarkable rate of participation; two-thirds of our average weekly attendance chose to take the survey and have their voices heard. And the survey revealed a lot, including the critical success factors for improving our organizational climate, pinpointing the strengths of our congregation's culture, discovering where we would like to go in the future, gauging our readiness for change, and uncovering potential resources we may be missing.

Around the time the survey was wrapping up, our profile committee was fully formed. In addition to Maribeth and Chris, members include Craig Reynolds, Constance Bullard, Liz Trapani, and Susan Wojtasik. We've been holding regular meetings, and are currently knee deep in our next big undertaking, responding to 12 thought-provoking questions that comprise our Office of Transition Ministry (OTM) Individual Ministry Portfolio. Our responses

to these questions become part of a nationwide database of faith communities like ours in search of new leadership. Our portfolio both paints a picture of us as a parish and outlines the gifts, skills and experience we are looking for in a new rector.

Another key issue for the Committee has been establishing a timeline for development of the profile that will enable the search committee to begin their work. We plan to have the profile ready by the end of May. Sharing this timeline, and our progress, with you is important to us. You can expect regular updates, and opportunities to participate and have your voice heard. We ask that you continue to pray for St. Stephen's as we continue to work together during this time of transition and renewal.

January

Happy Birthday:

- 2 David Aldrich, Cassidy Marie Devitt (17)
- 3 Kenneth Eddy
- 4 Andrea Appleton, Nancy Lamoureaux
- 9 Heather DiGrigoli (a milestone), Gwen Sears (92 years young!)
- 10 Cathy Carchedi
- 11 John Culver
- 12 Hunter Nelson (8)
- 17 Judith Washburn (a milestone)
- 18 Marcie Nevin
- 19 Zachary Turner (21!)
- 20 Judy Lamont
- 21 Jasmine Hyatt, Raylene Shaw (8)
- 22 Charlene Cassavant
- 23 Beverly Heidel
- 24 Aiden Discoe (15), Cassidy Goodwin (15)
- 25 Alyvia Marie Dowling (9), Soleil Laurin (18), Diana Macfarlane, Elliot Thompson (3)
- 26 David Nevin, Christiana Perry (15)
- 27 Teddy Carter
- 28 Simira Hanger (16), Nancy Zuber (a milestone)
- 29 Bert Boos (a milestone), Cameron Langsdale (17), Kaydence Rose Shaw (13)

Happy Anniversary:

- 7 Pat and John Moynahan (1956-64 years!)