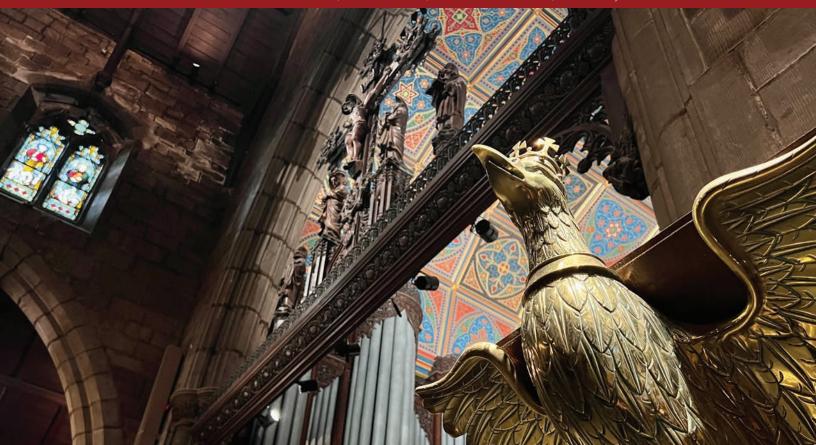


NEWSLETTER FOR SAINT MARK'S CHURCH, PHILADELPHIA

A COMMUNITY THAT GATHERS IN FAITH, SERVES IN LOVE, AND PROCLAIMS HOPE, THROUGH IESUS CHRIST,



GIFT, REBELLION, RELAPSE, & LOVE

FATHER SEAN MULLEN

Somewhere recently I came across the information that there are more self-published books published each year than books that are put out by publishing houses. This fact is just one piece of information that reminds me that, as a society, Americans have very few narratives in common anymore. We are reading or watching the stories and news that we choose, from a rapidly expanding menu that is always being algorithmically tailored to each of us individually and according to our preferences.

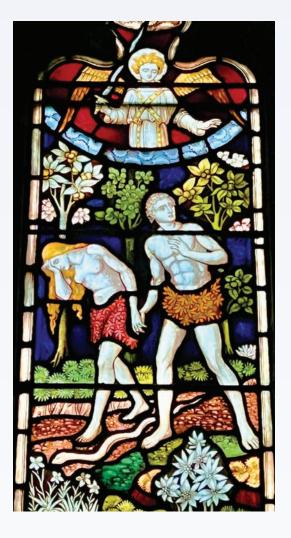
How can we form a cohesive human society without stories that we share? Throughout human history, shared narrative has been the means by which societies have formed and understood themselves, even when the meaning of those narratives is a matter of disagreement. When I was growing up, the TV show M*A*S*H* provided narratives that many people used to help process the experience of the Vietnam War. Not everyone liked or agreed with the stories or the characters, but they were widely shared

and provided a complex language with which people could talk not only about what happened, but about how they felt about what happened Vietnam. in But I grew up in the days when most people could reliably be assumed to share at least some familiarity with the content found national the three TVnetworks. Ιt was easier then.

It's not so easy now to find stories that we have in common. And without stories that we share, it's very hard for us to form a cohesive society.

The church has long understood herself to be the custodian of a common human narrative that is crucial to the forming of a healthy society. The Bible contains the core of that shared narrative

tradition: creation, the flood, delivery from Egypt, the covenant with Abraham, the Passion and Resurrection of Jesus. But the Bible, though widely sold, is not widely read, heard, or even perused. And its various literary components are easily misunderstood or completely bewildering to many who encounter them. Much to the chagrin of the Reformers of the 16th and 17th centuries, whose godly and sacrificial work gave us the scriptures in English, for most people a mentor or guide is still useful in navigating the stories, poems, history, prophecy, and apocalyptic literature that the Bible contains. The Scriptures were compiled by the church for the church and I suspect they are normally at their most helpful when engaged within the community of the church. Of course, you'll also find fewer people in church these days.



The Scriptures represent a significant body of the most important remaining shared human narratives, but the Scriptures' saturation social consciousness is much less thorough than it used to be. It has to be said that the church has played a role in the diminishing saturation of scriptural narrative in society in at least two ways. First, the church has degraded the power of the scriptural narrative by her notable, persistent, and mean-spirited transgressions child (like abuse, collusion with nation-states in their pursuit of power). Second, the church has often failed to proclaim the scriptural narrative at all or in any meaningful intelligible way. And the church herself has often contributed too to the decline in shared would helpful

narrative that our society.

The church, of all institutions, should understand that people come together to form societies for good reasons. And the church has a profound interest in promoting a happy and healthy human society where the kingdom of heaven can begin to dawn. Therefore the church also has a profound interest in reclaiming and promoting these foundational shared narratives.

The church's shared narratives are most likely to make these points:

- that everything we have has been given to us by God
- that humans have individually and collectively rebelled against God's wisdom, authority, and love; and as often as not have chosen to be selfish

- that although we have been called to repentance over and over again and to choose God's love over our demands, we habitually relapse, as individuals and as a society
- that God loves us anyway and will spare nothing in order to express his love and bring us back into a loving relationship with him this is his covenant of love.

Lent, which is fast approaching, is a narrative disguised as a season; it's intended to make the four points listed above, that are woven into a story that leads from the wilderness to the Cross and then to Easter morning. In Lent, the church uses time to try to draw us more intentionally into this shared narrative, and to convince us that it is, indeed widely shared, and that each and every one of us has a part in it.

The contours of this shared narrative begin and end with the vastness of God's love, but the inner chapters tell of human selfishness and rebellion. These contours feel honest to me precisely because they tell us some things we would rather not hear. Wisdom is often to be found in hearing what we would rather not hear. Everything we have has been given to us by God; we are prone to be rebellious in our relationship with God; we relapse often even when we try to align ourselves with God; but God loves us anyway and will stop at nothing to express his love and bring us to his heart.

To some extent, faith in Jesus can be described as our confidence in this narrative. At her best, the church reminds us that the truth of this story does not grow old, but our confidence in the narrative does sometimes get weak over time. The consequences are such that, without confidence in the narrative, our witness is diminished—and a diminished witness can lead to the evaporation of the story from the social fabric. Without shared narratives we try to claim our identities as individuals, rather than as members of a community. In these circumstances, what I call "my truth" seems to me to be more important that what might be "our truth" (or "the truth"). Just as my individual narrative takes pride of place over any shared narrative that requires compromise on my part, or worse yet, that calls me to seek pardon and

forgiveness, since these possibilities do not strike many as affirming.

The church bears responsibility for failing to proclaim pardon and forgiveness as affirming, and instead for presenting these objects of religious practice in the context of deep shame and guilt. If the church develops expertise in the inner chapters of the narrative—rebellion and relapse—without the framing grace of the beginning and end—giftedness and relentless love—then people can hardly be blamed for hearing exactly what the church has said, and deciding that they want little or nothing to do with it.

But the proclamation of God's pardon and forgiveness should be affirming. There is no damnation to be found, only hope, when the prophet declares "though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Is. 1:18). And this prophetic formula is a part of what ought to be a shared narrative for the whole world, as God intended for it to be.

At Saint Mark's we are working hard to be a place, a community, a source of the shared narratives that prepare all humanity for the dawning of the kingdom of heaven. The invitation to a holy Lent beckons us not only to enter a season, but also to open ourselves again to the shared narrative of gift, rebellion, relapse, and love that leads us from the manger, to the wilderness, to the Cross, and then to the empty tomb. We are telling and singing this story as many ways as we can, because it has more dimensions than we can account for. And who knows which dimension will catch your eye or your ear?

Be open to Lent and to what God will do in this season that is also a story. Reclaim the narratives of faith, not only as your own, but as the narratives that shape the community of which you are a member, since although this story is yours, it is not yours alone. When more of us can see again how we are part of a much, much larger shared narrative, it will be so much easier for the kingdom of heaven to dawn, and for all our hopes to be realized!



SAINT MARK'S SINGERS SPRING SEASON

Saint Mark's Singers had a great winter concert in December presenting favorite Advent and Christmas anthems and carols. The sizeable audience also joined in with lusty singing of a few seasonal hymns, too. The concert drew in a lot of new faces and was a great way to get in the mood for the Christmas season.

The next performance will be a liturgy for the music program at Saint Mark's. Following the tradition of Advent and Christmas services of Lessons of Carols, we will present a service of Eastertide Lessons and Carols. It will follow the narrative of the exodus from Egypt through to the Resurrection, Ascension, and Pentecost. There is a treasure trove of choral anthems that pertain to these stories. This liturgy will feature some of the biggest "barnburners" of the genre, including selections from Handel's Israel in Egypt, Stanford's Ye choirs of new Jerusalem, Finzi's God is gone up, and Elgar's The Spirit of the Lord is upon me. This is a great service to bring friends and family to, and one that you will not want to miss! We hope you will join us on Sunday, April 30 at 4 p.m.

UPCOMING EVENTS

FEBRUARY

22 Ash Wednesday

Mass with Imposition of Ashes at 7:30 a.m., 12:10 p.m., and 7 p.m.

MARCH

- 5 Choral Evensong & Benediction at 4 p.m.
- 11 Lenten Quiet Day
- 18 Lenten Clean-up Day beginning at 10:30 a.m.
- 25 Feast of the Annunciation Choral High Mass at 11 a.m.
- 31 Organ Improvised Stations of the Cross at 6:30 p.m.

APRIL

HOLY WEEK AT SAINT MARK'S

- 2 Palm Sunday
 Regular Mass Schedule
- 5 The Office of Tenebrae at 7 p.m.
- 6 Maundy Thursday
 Choral High Mass at 7 p.m.
 Vigil before the Sacrament to follow
- 7 Good Friday
 Solemn Liturgies at 12 noon
- 8 Holy Saturday: Easter Eve The Great Vigil of Easter at 8 p.m.
- 9 Easter Day
 Regular Mass Schedule

Learning in Compass

MOTHER BRIT FRAZIER

This year in our Saint Mark's children's and youth formation program, we have been delighted to offer a new Sunday morning cohort for students in high school (ages fourteen and up). For the past few years, the Connect formation class for ages eleven and older had been steadily increasing, and there has been enthusiasm among the staff to offer middle and high school-aged youth their own spaces for learning and growing together in faith.

It is the blessing of new beginnings that fresh opportunities arise for creativity. At the beginning of the fall, we approached the usual questions that accompany growth in education. What curriculum would we use for engaging high schoolers? What format would best direct our efforts toward that ideal blend of prayer, learning, and fun? Would anyone show up? By God's grace, the Compass group has served as a cherished addition to our formation offerings this year. With an average of six students (often up to eight, nine, or even ten when cousins are visiting!), the group has solidified as a natural extension of the Saint Mark's formation program.

In youth ministry curricula, it is common to organize the year's lessons around the order of scripture (i.e. beginning in Genesis and progressing through the Old Testament in one half of the year and the New Testament in the other). There is much to recommend this strategy, not the least of which is the fact that it makes a noble attempt to be comprehensive. It is certainly ideal to have students exposed to as much of the Bible as possible, and this Genesis-through-Revelation structure can inspire a diversity of activities and lessons that serve as a solid foundation for Christian education. This format leaves some things to be desired, however, when offered alongside the progression of the liturgical year in the Episcopal Church (and other traditions that embrace a cyclical lectionary). It is often the case that a formation class following a conventional curriculum will be learning about something quite different from what is being celebrated or preached about in church.

This dissonance is especially tricky for older students who often have sophisticated questions about the texts they encounter at Mass. While there are graces to many approaches to Christian education, our Compass program this year has experimented with a shift in our curriculum structure. Rather than beginning with Genesis and endeavoring to get as close as we're able to Revelation, the curriculum has followed the Episcopal lectionary that governs the texts appointed week by week. Each week, the high school students use full, adult study Bibles to explore the texts they have just heard in church.



This textual study is placed alongside broader lessons about the Bible itself—where it came from, how it was assembled and by whom, what the different Testaments contain, what languages it was written in, what the various books are up to, how different portions of the text speak to each other, and more. The history of the Bible itself is a fascinating discipline, and with its vibrant history and adventurous legacy, these lessons are always met with enthusiasm and good questions.

The Compass program this year has reiterated a truth in youth ministry that many faithful leaders would share if asked about their experience walking with children in their journeys of faith: by setting high expectations and welcoming children and youth to meet them, leaders will almost find that their students almost always exceed these expectations. Children are naturally in tune with the drama of the holy scriptures, and their curiosity is a God-given gift. Any good curriculum or learning plan can begin a year of growth and discovery, but it is the youth themselves who will be the fonts of wisdom week by week.

MUSIC AT SAINT MARK'S

ROBERT MCCORMICK

As Lent approaches, I am not quite ready to think about it, but Lent doesn't care what I think! At the present moment, however, with Christmastide and Epiphany newly in the rearview mirror, I am deeply grateful to have had our first "normal" celebrations of the Nativity in three years. Sadly, we had a few isolated incidences of illness among members of the choir, but nothing like December 2021 with widespread sickness. Thus, the choirs finally were able to sing repertoire for Christmas liturgies that had been planned for two years running (since, due to many Covid infections, we had to cancel choral music for Christmas 2021, I planned the same music for 2022). I am thankful we could worship the incarnate Lord with something like our customary fullness, and I am equally thankful to the Parish Choir, Boys' and Girls' Choir, and organists for their beautiful musicmaking throughout the season. Kudos are due as well to the Saint Mark's Singers, under the leadership of Thomas Gaynor, for a terrific concert on the afternoon of the Fourth Sunday of Advent.

I usually plan choral music for each academic year in two parts: September through Ash Wednesday, and Lent through Corpus Christi. In mid-January, I plan that second part. As always, there will be old favorites and as well as new music (at least new to some of us); perhaps even music that challenges us a bit. Sometimes even those who know church music well are surprised to learn that the music the choir sings, the hymns we all sing, or what the organists play are not necessarily the Organist & Choirmaster's (or any one person's) favorites. Much higher criteria for music selection are factors such as what each liturgy requires, a reasonable spectrum of diversity (in all sorts of ways) appropriate for an Anglo-Catholic parish, and hardly least, pastoral considerations. If it is good and necessary for all of us to be challenged occasionally, it is also very important that music feed and nourish the souls who hear it. (Perhaps that last part overlaps a bit with people's personal favorites, and perhaps that is all right.)

the topic of congregational singing, something I appreciate very much about the three Anglo-Catholic parishes I've served in my career is singing the Nicene Creed at High Masses. Many of you will have noted that we rotate through three settings annually: an English adaption of the socalled Credo III (a late addition to the Gregorian repertory) in "green seasons" and at Christmastide, an adaptation of Credo I (older than Credo III) in Advent and Lent, and a 20th century setting by Calvin Hampton in Eastertide. Each setting allows us to hear and engage with the confession of faith in a different way, and I hope they deepen each person's own faith accordingly. (I have my favorite and least favorite, but I won't share, here at least!) It has been so good in recent months to return to our full, previous pattern of congregational singing that was so greatly missed during much of the pandemic. This very much includes the 9 a.m. Family Mass being a Sung Mass in most respects, though due to time constraints, we do not chant the Creed at that liturgy.

In January, organ builder Charles Kegg came to survey our instrument, and how it is wired, in preparation for the new console his firm is building for us, with installation expected in early autumn of this year. On the subject of gratitude, we are most thankful to Fred Haas and the Wyncote Foundation for funding this project, which is the final, major piece in our landmark organ's restoration and reinvigoration. As shared previously in fuller detail (please ask me if you have questions) it will be made to look and function very much like the organ's original Aeolian-Skinner console (replaced in the 1950s), only with modern controls and computer technology. I am truly excited about the new console, and can hardly wait!

As ever, I look forward to seeing each of you in church, and hope everyone has a good, happy, and holy 2023.

THEOLOGY, RACE, AND THE CHURCH

A MORNING WITH SARAH COAKLEY AND VINCENT LLOYD

On the morning of Saturday, March 11, Saint Mark's will welcome two distinguished scholars to conduct a conversation about race and the church. Rev. Dr. Sarah Coakley is a priest of the church, who, in addition to teaching at the divinity schools of Harvard and Princeton Universities, capped her teaching career as the Norris-Hulse Professor of Divinity at the University of Cambridge in the U.K. Her writing, teaching, and preaching are highly regarded throughout the church, and her theological inquiry has explored matters of gender and sexuality in important ways.

Dr. Vincent Lloyd is a professor of theology and religious studies at Villanova University, as well as director of Africana Studies there. He has written widely about race from a theological perspective, including an examination of the way the Black Lives Matter movement intersects with religion (and the ways it may not).





The schedule for the morning will be as follows:

9 a.m. Mass in the Lady Chapel (note change from the usual time)

Coffee will be available in the Parish Hall starting at 9:15 a.m.

9:30 a.m. Opening session — After George Floyd:

Are We Stuck and Silenced on Race in the Church and Society?

Presented by Prof Lloyd and Prof Coakley

10:15 a.m. Vincent Lloyd on How to go Deeper 1:

The Issue of Black Dignity

A presentation by Prof Lloyd with interactive

questions from Prof Coakley

11 a.m. Break

11:15 a.m. Sarah Coakley on How to go Deeper, 2:

Racism and Its Relation to Sin, Desire, Prayer and Perception;

Why Theology is not an Optional Extra Interactive response from Prof Lloyd

and general discussion

12 noon Silent Prayer followed by blessing

12:30 p.m. Lunch, concluding at 1:30 p.m.

HEAR WHAT OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST SAITH

HYACINTH IVERSEN, MINISTRY RESIDENT FOR OUTREACH

Every other week at Saint Mark's, Low Mass is celebrated according to Rite I. After the celebrant says the Collect for Purity, they turn and face the people, saying the words of Jesus from the Gospel according to Matthew along with an invitation: "Hear what our Lord Jesus Christ saith: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets." I find myself turning this portion of the Mass over and over in my head as I write to you about the Food Cupboard this month.

The Food Cupboard continues to expand its clientele, with anywhere from forty to fifty new households filling out paperwork every month. Many of these people have been struggling prior to the pandemic and have simply discovered that we exist as a source of food, but there are many who have sought out food pantries for the first time in their lives due to inflation or long term circumstances caused by the pandemic. Rising costs impact everyone, but those who have been barely making ends meet are struggling all the more.

Every week, I and the volunteers, receive anywhere from twelve to eighteen hundred pounds of food... and hand it out again almost as quickly. Every week, a dozen (often more) new people come in, in desperate need. Every week, I see faces coming back who said that the last time they were here was going to be it, they're getting more shifts, things are changing.

But things aren't. The only thing that's changed is the level of their need. Our Lord said that "the poor will always be with you" (Matthew 26:11). I don't believe this statement was made out of a desire for there to be people suffering and in need until the end of time. Rather, that there will always be downtrodden people in a lot of need, because human beings can be (and often are) selfish and greedy. As followers of Christ, it's our responsibility to turn away from these selfish desires and instead towards the poor, the sick, and the suffering. This is not an easy task, especially when we serve people in such enormous need. It can be downright exhausting to see the same faces week after week, month after month, year after year.

Not necessarily because of the amount of work, but because of the amount of caring. This is the gospel: caring even when people stay poor and homeless and desperate, month after month, year after year. How can I look at the face of another human being created in the image of God and not offer them a little bit of love? Are they less deserving simply because this is their third year in need instead of their third day? The answers to these questions are simple to write, and not as simple to practice: "I cannot in good conscience," and "absolutely not."

This is loving your neighbor as yourself. This is what all the law and the prophets point towards.

There's been a bit of a change in volunteers as well- since I arrived in August of 2021, there have been multiple long time volunteers who have needed to step back for various reasons. New people have stepped up almost the second I needed them, however, and I'm not only grateful for them, but glad to invite them into the sacred work of feeding God's people. It isn't always easy, nor is it particularly glamorous—but it is our Lord's direct commandment. So we turn again towards God's people, and in so doing, we turn ourselves to the work of loving our neighbors. Thanks be to God.

Stations of the Cross IN LENT

Stations of the Cross will again be prayed each Friday in Lent immediately following Evening Prayer at 5:30, with the exception of Friday, March 31, when at the special time of 6:30 p.m., Robert McCormick will improvise organ meditations for each of the fourteen stations, along with the reading of scripture and poetry. One of Robert's specialties is organ improvisation, and this event is intended to be a distinctive way to enter into the mystery of Jesus' suffering and death.





THE 175 TH ANNIVERSARY

of the Founding of Saint Mark's

The first meeting of men (they were mostly men at the time) to discuss the establishment of Saint Mark's took place in June of 1847 just down the block from where the church now stands. On the Feast of Saint Mark, April 25 of the following year the cornerstone of the church had been laid, and on October 21 of 1849 the first service was held on the site in the unfinished building. Please take note of our first event to celebrate our 175th anniversary.

April 25, 2023, at 7 p.m.

THE 175TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE LAYING OF THE CORNERSTONE OF THE BUILDING

Choral High Mass for the Feast of Saint Mark the Evangelist

There will be various other opportunities to celebrate, as well as some exhibitions, publications, and general merriment over the coming year as we celebrate this milestone in our life together in Christ.

ADULT FORUM

Join us any Sunday for coffee and discussion with others in the parish and learn more about how they think and pray and live. We meet informally at 10 a.m. in the Parish Hall.

Lent in two questions

Mother Johnson will lead a two-part discussion designed to get us focused on two central questions that we need to ask at this time of year:

FEBRUARY 26 WHAT IS SIN? **MARCH 5** WHAT IS REPENTANCE?

RELIGIOUS BELIEF AND RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

Parishioner Roy A. Clouser is professor emeritus of the College of New Jersey. He has served as professor of philosophy, religion, and is the resident philosopher of the Christian Leaders Institute. He will lead us in a three-part discussion of religious belief and religious experience.

MARCH 12 HOW DO WE KNOW SCRIPTURE COMES FROM GOD?MARCH 19 WHAT IS RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE?MARCH 26 CHRISTIANITY COMPARED WITH ATHEISM

April Forum

APRIL 16 WHAT IS RESURRECTION?

Join Mother Johnson for a discussion about the resurrection.

What do we believe a bout this central fact of our faith?

What does resurrection mean in our daily lives?

April 30 Poetry in Eastertide

A reading of poems from the Christian tradition that help us to think in new ways about our experience of Easter.

NO FORUM

April 2: Palm Sunday April 9: Easter Sunday April 23: Bishop's Visitation

JUST WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?

FATHER STEPHEN MOORE

If you think working out who your neighbor really is, begin by trying to define "parishioner!" A starting point may be one of the dictionary definitions: "an inhabitant of a parish, especially one who belongs to or attends a particular church." Fair enough, but as any Sunday proves, "inhabiting," "belonging" and "attending" are words with complexions of very different meanings. Social media unspools such a traditional concept of parishioner even further. When the typical Sunday Mass is watched by hundreds across America and overseas, then the word becomes still-more unreal.

Now try working out a definition of "parish." Neither the constitution and canons of the Episcopal Church nor the Diocese of Pennsylvania define the word. It used to be loosely regarded as an administrative district, with geographical boundaries and the church at its center of life. Saint Mark's, with a primary catchment across three states, doesn't fit this historic mold by a long shot.

For Saint Mark's, the church remains where disciples, stewards, and pilgrims are formed. The contemporary reality of the indistinction of "parish" and "parishioner" matters when you think about defining who your Saint Mark's neighbor is. Yet any precise attempt of a definition is unhinged when applying what we accept as Jesus' incarnational intention—to be a neighbor means to come alongside someone.

The true lesson of Christianity is to love one's neighbor. Now all this isn't some idle indulgence of esoteric arcana, the trivia of an idle winter's afternoon. Within the parish office of Saint Mark's, coming up with a working definition of "parishioner" impacts every activity, from inclusion on a mailing list, eligibility to stand for vestry to an appeal for stewardship. When and how someone makes the transition, for instance, from "newcomer" to "parishioner" is a process that many on the parish staff and lay people ponder.

For Neighbor Care, this issue is important in its endeavor to be a universal ministry. It is part of the Invite, Welcome, and Connect approach Saint Mark's takes to all who come to church, reinforcing the inclusion in the daily proclamation 'We are the Body of



Christ.' Invite is an action of evangelism; Welcome is expressed through hospitality; and Connect achieves a sense of belonging. As stated by the Right Reverend Frank Logue, 11th Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Georgia:

"We have seen the tools in this work bear fruit as congregations go through transitions from being friendly to one another to genuinely encouraging their neighbors to attend, welcoming all who show up, and engaging with newcomers to weave themselves into the life of the parish. Checking in on Invite-Welcome-Connect has been a part of every bishop visitation and our work in congregational development not because this is a program to emulate, but it offers an ethos, a way of being church, that fits with Jesus' life and teaching."

Three years after the introduction of Realm as the parish's database, Neighbor Care is closer to being in reach of many who call Saint Mark's their "parish" after a recent major effort to work through the database. Across our community of faith, leaders in charge of the seven clusters encourage more than 400 people in their respective neighborhoods to do no more than gather, share in hospitality, look out for each other and, in many ways—spiritual as well as simple—build a deeper sense of belonging.

Who is *my* neighbor you ask? Everyone and anyone.





Update on Stewardship

Jesus taught again and again about the importance of sharing what we have with one another and with the church. His parables about faithful and wise stewards who make something of what has been entrusted to them are among his most poignant teachings. Every parish community depends on its members to live into the implications of these teachings in order for the church to accomplish her work and mission. The people of Saint Mark's have continued to be generous as we move into a post-pandemic reality. As of the end of January, we received 203 pledges for support totaling just short of \$562,000. It's not too late to make your pledge, and we hope you will do so if you have not yet. Thank you to all of you who pledge so generously and make the ministry of this parish possible! Details of the budget for 2023 were presented at the Annual Parish Meeting on February 12, and are available now online thereafter.

