

The Reverend Cynthia A. Sever, Rector

***The Episcopal Parish of Alton has as its mission:
To live and show Christ in our midst.***



into

Dear Parish Family and Friends.

Before too long we'll be moved back St. Paul's, and both St. Paul's and Trinity will be fully operational again!

The COVID pandemic has been truly hard on all churches and most businesses. So many have not survived. We've had our share of what other churches have experienced, with some people leaving for one reason or another; others staying home either until the pandemic ends or until they can sit in their own pew again; and still others have gotten used to staying home on Sundays while watching the service on Facebook or skipping church altogether.

When attendance is down, giving is always down as well, although most of you have done a great job of supporting the parish. Thank you for your faithfulness in giving!

Some of you have asked me whether we will survive all of this. The fire riding in on the back of the pandemic has been especially difficult for us, but we have survived and more than that thrived during this time. While some people have left, others have joined us. A core of parishioners have attended no matter where or how we have worshipped, and our average Sunday attendance has held steady. Diane Martin and I traveled over three counties every Sunday for a long time to bring Holy Communion to parishioners at home. We would be happy to visit you as well!

These experiences have taught us many things. We learned to ZOOM meetings and classes and livestream our services via Facebook Live! When the pandemic is over or truly lessened, we will be able to offer in person meetings and classes for those who wish to attend in person and also have ZOOMERS join us if they prefer.

The garden services and home visits were unexpected blessings. Worshipping God in the beauty of the garden was a true spiritual experience for many of us; we felt the strong presence of the Holy Spirit there. We plan to worship out in the garden again every once-in-a-while in nice weather.

The home visits, even though we did not go into the houses due to COVID, proved to be a wonderful way to get to know parishioners better. These visits will continue whenever we have parishioners who can't come to church. We will also continue to broadcast our services on Facebook Live to allow our parish family to be a part of the service from home.

We've learned that we need to be together. It seems the pandemic and fire have made us feel closer to one another. We've also learned that our buildings are important to us, although not nearly as important as we are to each other. **It is time to come back to church!**



Lastly, we've learned that the pandemic and fire hit a "reset" switch that has been a big blessing, in that it brought our programs and mission projects to a temporary stop. This allowed us to begin a discernment process to ask God where and how we should serve others in his name, and which programs and events we might offer.

Traditional worship from the *Book of Common Prayer* and other types of worship experiences to grow congregations within our parish, such as Mondays@7 and PAWS are all important. Building on our long-standing and excellent music program is very important, as is teaching classes and leading discussion groups about God, our relationship with God, the Bible, and the Episcopal Church. One new group, the Wednesday Evening Discussion Group, actually began after the fire and continues with gusto!

We'll keep all of the favorite educational, social, fundraising, and study programs that have been successful and have parishioners interested in their continuation

We have discerned that we are being called to offer feeding programs, especially since we live in an area with an especially high percentage of people who are hungry or food insecure, including children. We will have a Vestry planning day in the new year to evaluate which type of programs fit our parish. In the meantime, we are helping with First Presbyterian's Saturday Café, which feeds roughly 45 people weekly.

We are also getting ready to launch the 4PAWS Pet Food Pantry, to supplement the food of the pets of those humans who are hungry, so those people don't have to share their precious food with their pets who are sometimes the only "family" they may have. This will not only help feed the hungry, but hopefully reduce the number of pets turned in to shelters in our area.

I would love to build on our strong Mondays@7 service and increase our ministries geared toward our brothers and sisters in the Twelve-Step tradition, but meaningful for all of us.

There are countless exciting ways we can reach out in mission in the name of Christ!

Will we survive after COVID and the fire? **YES** and we will grow stronger as we follow Christ and build together! This reminds me of the old *Mission Impossible* TV series. Those impossible missions always proved to be possible in the end, and with God's help, our growing strength and revitalization will also turn out to be **Mission ~~Im~~Possible!**

Our concentration on service to one another and to those outside our walls, going out into the world and meeting people where they are, good liturgy and music, education, planting congregations within our parish like PAWS & Mondays@7, and social activities will certainly cause other like-minded people to join us.

Will you help us build our parish in these and other ways? Will you be a partner in the revitalization of our parish? This is the season of the year when we need to make a budget to guide us in the coming year.

If it is possible for you in these difficult times, will you please consider pledging to the parish if you haven't in the past? If you have pledged, will you please consider raising your pledge by 3% or more to support the parish in 2022?

I can't wait to continue building with you as we take on **Mission ~~Im~~Possible!** I wish you God's richest blessings in the coming year.

Faithfully,

Mother Cindy +

Christmas Schedule

Christmas Eve @ 4:00 P.M. Special Christmas Music
4:30 P.M. Holy Eucharist



Christmas Day @ 10 A.M. Holy Eucharist

We will be at Trinity for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.

Our Prayer List

Please keep these people in your daily prayers:

Mary Lynn, Skip, Larry, Robert, Richard, Al, Ruth, Anne, Cheryl, Bill, Richard, Kay, Kim, Marie, Myrnelle, Mother Jane, Barb, Frank, Sarah, John and Boyd.

If you would like to have a name added or removed from our prayer list, please contact Mother Cindy at 465-9149.

The Glorious Weeds



Once upon a time there was a little girl who had nothing to offer to the baby Jesus at a Christmas Eve Service. All that she could find was a bunch of weeds found by the road. In the church, the girl knelt to place the bunch of weeds, all she had, near the nativity scene. As the ugly brown weeds were laid close to Jesus, they burst into bright red flowers and later came to be called Flores de Noche Buena, or Flowers of the Holy Night. Today we call them poinsettias.

The shape of the poinsettias, with their bright red flowers came to represent the beautiful Star of Bethlehem. They are also sometimes thought to represent the blood of Christ. The

moral of the story reminds us that Jesus accepts all of our gifts and can do wonders with them!

~ Based on the stories of James Cooper and a Mexican legend.

The Origins of the Advent Candle

It seems that many of our modern Advent traditions came from Germany – as does the Advent wreath.

In the early 1800s Johann Hinrich Wichern (1808-1881), a pastor, felt the need to help children count the days through Advent to Christmas. He began with an old cartwheel and used small white candles to be lit on weekdays and Saturdays in order to count the days as Christmas approached. A small white candle was not lit on Sundays; however, a large white candle was lit in the center of the wheel on Christmas. Variations of this practice in Germany spread to the United States by immigrants in the late 19th and early 20th Century.

Advent wreaths today follow from the originals but have become more elaborate. They also symbolize counting the time to Jesus' birth in a similar yet different ways. In some places, the four Advent candles are now surrounded by a wreath of evergreens, holly leaves, berries or pinecones – all very symbolic. Evergreens symbolize everlasting life, holly leaves and berries the crown of thorns and the pinecones, resurrection.

There are no longer little white candles to count each day, but four large candles for the four Sundays of Advent. The color of the candles may vary from church to church, but the commonly used are violet or blue for the first, second and fourth Sundays of Advent, which symbolize. On the third Sunday a rose-colored candle is lit. At St. Paul's we use blue to match the front of the altar.

Each candle altar symbolizes a different attribute:

Week 1 – hope, as well as the prophets of the Old Testament

Week 2 – faith, and Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem

Week 3, also called "Gaudete," for rejoice, for joy and the shepherds

Week – peace, and the Angels' message of "peace on Earth, goodwill to All People."

And at last, on Christmas, "the people who work in darkness have seen a great light," as we light the large white center candle, called the "Christ Candle" and celebrate the purity of our Lord Jesus Christ who is the light of the world.

Sources

Episcopal Dictionary of the Church

The Episcopal Handbook

Ask the UMC Book of Occasional Services



St. Francis and the Creche

St. Francis of Assisi (1226), with his unadulterated joy and love for Jesus, which he so wanted to pass on to others, has been credited with creating the first Nativity scene(creche) in the year 1223. The account of this event comes mainly from St. Bonaventure, whom much of the information about the life of St. Francis was collected.

According to St. Bonaventure, Francis intensely desired for the people of his village to truly experience the miracle of the Nativity of Jesus. Francis obtained permission from Pope Honorious III to construct a manger in a small cave above the town of Greccio, Italy. He filled the manger with hay then acquired an ox and a donkey and set them with the manger.

It was with unadulterated joy that Francis brought people from far and near to experience the birth of the Christ Child. There was no mention of anything else but the manger, hay, ox and donkey in his live scene. The villagers would gaze upon the scene while Francis excitedly shared the story about the “babe of Bethlehem.”

Overcome by emotion, adoration and humility, Francis could not utter the name “Jesus” – hence the “babe of Bethlehem.” Legend has it that the hay that Francis used miraculously acquired the power to cure cattle diseases and other pestilence!

Fast forward a century or so, and nativity scenes had spread throughout Europe. No one seems to know if Francis had used people to play the parts of Mary, Joseph and the baby. He may have left them to the imagination but as time went on “actors” and even a whole cast of characters became included. It was said that sometimes an entire village would play parts of the scene. This sometimes still happens today.

Our nativity scenes today usually rely on a cast of characters either live or in statuary. The inclusion of wisemen and shepherds usually play a part. Wisemen who arrived in the region roughly two years later, however, are not mentioned in all four Gospels. Only Matthew mentions “wisemen.” Luke comments on shepherds,

however, there is no mention of donkeys, oxen or other barnyard creatures.

However, we can know for sure that all creation was present and is present still with choirs of angels in celebrating the “babe of Bethlehem.”

~ by Diane Martin

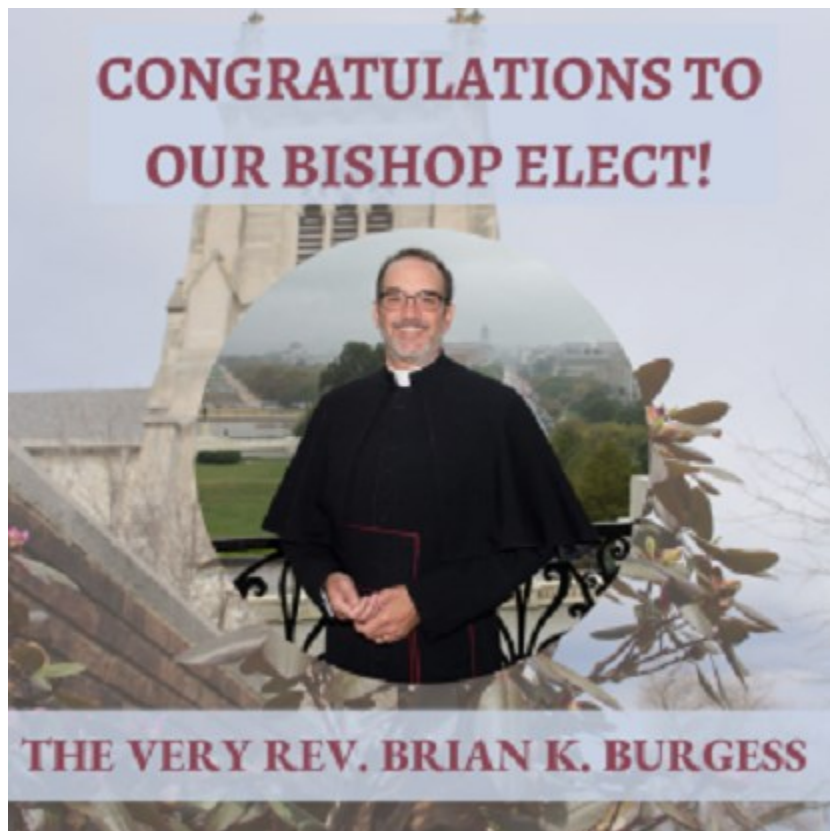
Sources

The Life of St. Francis of Assisi by St. Bonaventure

St. Francis and the Creche by The Rev. William Sanders



BISHOP ELECT



The Election Synod of the Episcopal Diocese of Springfield on Dec. 11 has made The Very Rev. Brian Kendall Burgess bishop elect of the diocese. Before being made the 12th Bishop of Springfield he must go through a “consent process” during which a majority of bishops in the United States as well as diocesan Standing committees across the nation must approve the election.

If approved, Presiding Bishop Michael Curry, primate of the Episcopal Church and chief consecrator, will consecrate him May 21, 2022.

Father Burgess, a rector from the Diocese of New Jersey, was elected on the second ballot by a majority of both the laity and clergy. He ran against fellow nominees the Rev. Mary Ann Hill from Oklahoma and the Rev. Scott Allen Seefeldt. Originally there were nine candidates but the three were chosen at the recent Nominating Synod at the Cathedral Church of

Saint Paul in Springfield.

Father Burgess has been rector of Christ Church in Woodbury New Jersey since 2005. Before that he was associate priest and chaplain at Saint Luke’s Church & Parish Day School in Baton Rouge, Louisiana from 2001 to 2005. From 1999 to 2001 he was rector and Deacon-in-charge at Saint John’s Episcopal Church, Brooksville in the Diocese of Southwest Florida.

He was born Nov. 6, 1960 in Tampa, Fla. In April of 1985 he married Denise L. (Swing) Burgess. The couple have two grown children Robert K. Burgess and Catherine M. Burgess.

Father Burgess is a graduate of Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana. In 1990 he graduated from the Southwest Florida Criminal Justice Academy in Fort Myers, Fla. He also attended the Federal Emergency Management Institute in Maryland from 1992 to 1996. The bishop elect is a graduate of the University of the South, School of Theology in Sewanee, Tennessee.

Before becoming a priest, he served as a port authority police officer for the Lee County Board of Commissioners in Fort Myers from 1990 to 91 then emergency management operations coordinator and training coordinator from 1991 to 1996.

Please keep Father Burgess and those involved in the Consent Process in your prayers. For more on the bishop elect check the Diocese website.

~ by Tom Wrausmann



Book Club

The St. Paul's Book Club will meet on Wednesday, January 26, at 9:30 a.m. at LuciAnna's on Broadway in Alton. Please join us for a lively discussion and fellowship.

The selection for January is *The Dogs of Bedlam Farm: An Adventure with Sixteen Sheep, Three Dogs, Two Donkeys, and Me* by Jon Katz.

Following is a short introduction to the book.

"Dogs are blameless, devoid of calculation, neither blessed nor cursed with human motives. They can't really be held responsible for what they do. But we can."

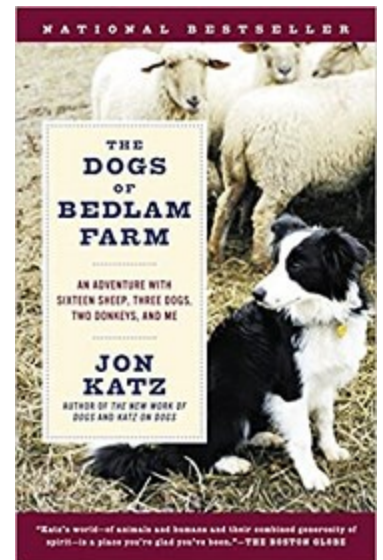
—from *The Dogs of Bedlam Farm*

*When Jon Katz adopted a border collie named Orson, his whole world changed. Gone were the two yellow Labs he wrote about in *A Dog Year*, as was the mountaintop cabin they loved. Katz moved into an old farmhouse on forty-two acres of pasture and woods with a menagerie: a ram named Nesbitt, fifteen ewes, a lonely donkey named Carol, a baby donkey named Fanny, and three border collies.*

Training Orson was a demanding project. But a perceptive dog trainer and friend told Katz: "If you want to have a better dog, you will just have to be a better human." It was a lesson Katz took to heart. He now sees his dogs as a reflection of his willingness to improve, as well as a critical reminder of his shortcomings. Katz shows us that dogs are often what we make them: They may have their own traits and personalities, but in the end, they are mirrors of our own lives—living, breathing testaments to our strengths and frustrations, our families and our pasts.

The Dogs of Bedlam Farm recounts a harrowing winter Katz spent on a remote, windswept hillside in upstate New York with a few life-saving friends, ugly ghosts from the past, and more livestock than any novice should attempt to manage. Heartwarming, and full of drama, insight, and hard-won wisdom, it is the story of his several dogs forced Katz to confront his sense of humanity, and how he learned the places a dog could lead him and the ways a dog could change him.

The Dogs of Bedlam Farm is available from Amazon.



Our Christmas Jar netted a total of \$547.68 with the help of the entire parish. A big thank you to everyone's generosity! We also raffled off a lithographed Christmas throw which not only increased our Christmas Jar collection but supported world literacy. It was decided that the jar will be gifted to a woman known to Mimi that was just diagnosed with ALS and is in much need

of support. ~ Jean Downey

BIRTHDAYS



December Birthdays

- 3 Kate Simpson
- 5 Luke Mills
- 8 Ann Bromaghim
- 13 Kristina Stone
- 14 Verla Moyer
- 18 Meg Dorris, Gabrielle Hughes
- 24 Judy Jones
- 30 Diana Enloe

January Birthdays

- 1 William Harris
- 6 Randy Smith, Sean Stone
- 11 Veronica Wrausmann
- 12 Chris Donohoo
- 17 Bryant Johnson
- 19 Terry Durham, Elizabeth Foley
- 21 Ann Barker
- 22 Andrew Cook
- 26 Tracey Summers
- 27 Lee Cox
- 29 Millie Hancock
- 31 Richard Napp

Is your birthday missing from this list? Please let Mother Cindy know about any missing

birthdays!

Calendar

Sunday, Dec. 19	9 a.m. Mass at Trinity Chapel 11 a.m. Mass at Trinity Chapel
Monday, Dec. 13	Mondays@7 at Trinity Chapel
Wednesday, Dec. 22	NO Wednesday Discussion Group via ZOOM
Sunday, Dec. 26	9 a.m. Mass at Trinity Chapel 11 a.m. Mass at Trinity Chapel
Monday, Dec. 27	Mondays@7 at Trinity Chapel
Wednesday, Dec. 29	NO Wednesday Discussion Group via ZOOM



January

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	day, January 2, 2022	9 a.m. Mass at Trinity Chapel 11 a.m. Mass at Trinity Chapel NO PAWS today
Monday, January 3	Mondays@7 at Trinity Chapel	
Wednesday, January 5	Wednesday Discussion Group via ZOOM	
Sunday, January 9	9 a.m. Mass at Trinity Chapel 11 a.m. Mass at Trinity Chapel	
Monday, January 10	Mondays@7 at Trinity Chapel	
Wednesday, January 13	Wednesday Discussion Group via ZOOM	
Sunday, January 16	9 a.m. Mass at Trinity Chapel 11 a.m. Mass at Trinity Chapel	
Monday, January 17	Mondays@7 at Trinity Chapel	
Wednesday, January 19	Wednesday Discussion Group via ZOOM	
Sunday, January 23	9 a.m. Mass 11 a.m. Mass	
Monday, January 24	Mondays@7 at Trinity Chapel	
Wednesday, January 26	9:30 a.m. Book Club at LuciAnna's 7 p.m. Wednesday Discussion Group via ZOOM	
Sunday, January 30	9 a.m. Mass	

Membership has its privileges: from the *Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church*

Did you know that *in order to be considered a **member** of a parish, one must have undergone Baptism in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and have that Baptism recorded in the parish register?*

*Members aged 16 years and older are considered **adult members**?*

*All members who have received Holy Communion at least three times in the past year are called **communicants**?*

*All communicants of the parish who have been **faithful in corporate worship**, unless for good cause prevented, and have been faithful in working, praying, and giving for the spread of the Kingdom of God, are to be considered **communicants in good standing**?*

In order to serve on committees, vote at the annual meeting, or hold offices in the parish, one must be a **communicant in good standing**? Attending worship, giving, prayer, and being part of parish life are important!



Vestry News

The Vestry is considering decreasing the number of Vestry members from twelve to nine. Our number of 12 Vestry members is left over from when we were a larger parish (at least a few decades ago.) We hope we will need 12 again someday, but for now it is very difficult for us to find enough qualified members to run for election, and the number can be cumbersome for a parish of our size.

We currently elect four Vestry members yearly so that we have three “classes” of four people each serving three-year terms. We plan to elect one less person each year for three years to finally arrive at nine Vestry members. We can then assess how this number works for our parish and adjust the number either upwards or downwards from there.

Please let us know your thoughts on this topic!

~ Mother Cindy & the Vestry



Financial Frustrations are easing!

Some of you let us know that your pledge statements were **really** incorrect; some of you got zero credit for whole months you faithfully paid your pledge or contributed to the parish. That caused me to look into things more closely. I don't know what you may have heard or wondered about this, but **I want you to understand that nothing improper (as in illegal or immoral) has been found, and no funds have been misappropriated!** All of your hard-earned donations are safe and being used as you wish.



The best way I can describe this is that our financial statements are like a big, very tangled ball of yarn. Many things were just not classified or entered correctly. Because this is not my specialty, I needed help untangling, so I called my good friend Jason Fredrick, who has his own very successful and well-respected accounting firm called Balancing the Books.

I first met Jason when I hired him as the Organist-Choirmaster of Grace Church, Lockport, NY. I soon learned that he is a whiz at several types of keyboards – not only organ but the computer keyboard as an accountant as well! Jason is an Episcopalian and has experience doing accounting for Episcopal churches. In fact, he helped Grace Church straighten out their tangled accounts. Jason quickly became one of my dearest and closest friends. He is one of the smartest, kindest, and most honest and ethical people I know, and I would trust him with my very life, as would Byron.

The Vestry decided in September to hire Jason through the end of January to straighten up our accounts. Because he is my friend, he is deeply discounting his professional services. As it turns out, it looks as if we will need to hire him for a longer period of time, because things are a little more tangled than we thought at first. Jason was immediately able to enable us to make payroll and pay our bills. He needs a lot of information from us in order to completely unsnarl our accounts, but this is time-consuming. Treasurer Judy Jones and I are working with some volunteers to find the information Jason needs and to ensure you get full tax credit for your donations. We will be back on untangled ground soon!!

I want to reduce the hours worked by the secretary I will hire when things get straightened out to sixteen hours instead of twenty-four weekly, and hire an accountant to keep doing most of the financial work. The money we save on the secretary's salary will more than help pay for accounting services. I want to ensure that we never get into this situation again.

I wholeheartedly wish you would ask me any questions you may have about our financial situation. I will keep you posted as things progress.

Faithfully,

Almost Finished?

Our Wednesday Discussion Group, on Zoom, is almost finished with Walk in Love: Episcopal Beliefs and Practices. We have finished our concentration on a “Trinitarian Life” – three chapters on the Holy Trinity including: “God the Father and Creation Care,” “God the Son and Incarnation,” and “God the Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts.”

Sounds heavy! And it is. However, the delightful writing of authors Gunn and Shobe that make this incredibly unimaginable topic a joy to read, mark and inwardly digest.

It won't be long before we complete this overview of the beliefs and practices of the Episcopal Church!

We hope you will join us when the time comes to begin our next book *UNAFRAID: Living with Courage and Hope in Uncertain Times* by Adam Hamilton. A great description of the book comes from Philip Yancey who wrote “Informed by psychology and neuroscience, Adam Hamilton applies practical wisdom gleaned from the Bible and from his years as a pastor. I could almost feel my blood pressure go down as I read!”

The book is on sale via the church Bookstore for \$22, a bargain because of the store discount. Please, even if you don't participate in the Zoom sessions, we have plenty of copies if you would like to read it on your own. Thank you! To buy a book please contact Diane Martin, 618-225-2676.

