

A GOOD WILDERNESS

“God never wastes a wilderness.”

In early December, one of St. James Elders sent this short quote to the church Session. They sent it to encourage us as we went into the final weeks of 2020, a profoundly challenging year. I believe they sent it with the intention to remind us all that God is up to something in this wilderness of a year. God is doing something in us, moving through the downed trees and tangled undergrowth that has been this year. Our work is to pay attention and remember that God is not wasting any moment but rather stirring up the next thing.

We closed out the 2020 year with Zoom services, gathered distantly in our homes, yet bound together all the more through this challenging time. And as we look ahead into 2021, we are gifted with the chance to ask: “God, what are you up to?” We have certainly been in a wilderness of masks, hand sanitizer, nasal swabs, new technology, and profound heartache. Where is God in this wilderness?

Before noting some places that I believe God is stirring us up as we walk through the wilderness, I want to pause to remind us: God is with us in the wilderness. In the trees, it can be difficult to see how God could possibly be moving through all that is not right in this present day. But that is precisely where God is: HERE! God has been journeying alongside us (and ahead, above, below, and behind us) through this wilderness. Like any experienced guide, God knows where they are going. Siblings in Christ, please never forget this: God will never leave us or forsake us in the wilderness. The wildernesses of our life will come and go, but God remains faithful and present.

So what might God be doing in this wilderness? I see lots of ways God has used 2020 to strengthen and focus the ways the Church works in the world. First, we have seen how the Church “came home” and was discovered at our hearths, tables, computer, and tablet screens. We are no longer able to separate “home life” and “church life” — these spaces have bled together and reminded us that the sacred can be discovered anywhere, in any home and in any wilderness. Second, we have seen the emergence of renewed connections with each other in simple, intimate ways. I have heard from several folks who began to get involved with the St. James congregation just as the pandemic hit. While that might seem like a wilderness too vast to actually keep engaging in, these folks have even found new and deep connections through our post-church Zoom fellowship, book studies online, posting pictures of “COVID life” and, sharing in the journey together. Where the wilderness may have separated us from these new members, God has used it as a journey to bind us closer together. We have found ways to walk the path through the wilderness together, helping others along, and caring for one another. This has been beautiful.

Finally, I see that God has used this time of wilderness to remind us who we are. In the Scriptures, the wilderness is often a place where prophets and disciples seek the Spirit and discover their calling. For so many of us, the wilderness of 2020 has been a space for clarifying where we see God leading us. Personally, I feel the call out of this wilderness to focus on speaking up for issues of justice to raise my voice as an ally to the oppressed. And I’m feeling called to do this in new ways that I don’t think would have emerged if I had not been invited to walk through this wilderness over the last year. The wilderness still seems vast. We can’t see beyond, right now at least. But we can affirm that God is not wasting this good wilderness to help us grow, bear witness to God’s lovingkindness day by day, and build our resolve to live in faith, hope, and love as we journey into 2021.

Grace and Peace,



Rev. Seth Thomas



FINANCE COMMITTEE UPDATE - December 2020

Gratitude and Hope

By Lindsay Anderson, Finance Chair

We made it to the end of 2020! Every December the Finance Committee prepares a proposed General Operating Budget based on forecasted giving and projected expenses. It is safe to say that, though we always anticipate that things will not shake down exactly as expected, none of us were prepared for the roller coaster this past year would bring. Even so, we predict that will end the year with our general operating fund, the endowment funds, and our designated giving funds to remain strong.

Through God's faithfulness and St. James' history of wise stewardship, we are hopeful for what we will be able to do in 2021!



If you would like to make a 2021 pledge, you may do so online via this pledge form or by contacting Marina McLeod, stjamestreasurer.bham@gmail.com.

Pledges and offerings help move the day-to-day ministry of St. James forward. It was exciting to see an increase in our general offering over the past twelve months, though overall, both income and expenses have been lower than projected. We currently have approximately \$6,500 in excess as of November 30.

Following is an update on St. James' Year to Date General Operating Budget:

Income/Expenses As of 11-30-2020	NOVEMBER ACTUAL	NOVEMBER BUDGET	YR TO DATE ACTUAL	YR TO DATE BUDGET
Income	\$17,092	\$19,844	\$214,571	\$230,882
Expenses	\$18,681	\$19,739	\$207,989	\$236,669

While we are worshipping at home during this time you can to give in TWO primary ways:

1. **Online Giving:** You can give a one-time gift or create a recurring monthly pledge. Please visit this webpage to set up or update your online giving here: <https://saintjamespres.churchcenter.com/giving>

If you are new to online giving we've got a handy video to show you how, here:

<https://www.loom.com/share/5aea350026204a9cb3c955029dafbdd3>

2. **Mail-In Donations:** You can mail your pledges and gifts to the church. Please note that though the church office will be closed, mail will be checked regularly.

St. James Presbyterian Church
910 14th Street, Bellingham, WA 98225

Need assistance or would you like to schedule a contact-free donation pick-up?

Contact Marina McLeod, stjamestreasurer@gmail.com

CHRISTIAN FAITH FORMATION

By Tracy Caruso, Children & Family Ministry Director



Greetings from the Director of Children and Family Ministries! What a year 2020 was. I know I, and probably most of you, are not sad to say goodbye to 2020.

I think our St. James family ended our 2020 on a good note with many participating in Interfaith's annual **Holiday Joy** program, a great book study of Kathy Escobar's *A Weary World*, and a beautiful connected but distant zoom candlelight Christmas Eve service.

A huge **Thank You** to all of you who helped support the Interfaith's **Holiday Joy** program!

This year we were able to provide 10 children 2 gift cards each and an extra 6 gift cards to be used by Interfaith, for families, at their discretion. Especially this year, this program is so important in order to give some children a little joy at Christmas.

Our Youth Group continues to meet twice a month over zoom to have some fun social games, work on projects like the **Holiday Joy** or the **Postcard** program, and study our Simple Sunday's curriculum. Anyone in middle or high school is welcome to join us! Email Tracy for the zoom link.

As we anxiously await the time we can return to some of our social traditions around St. James, I hope you can look back at 2020 and see some of the amazing things we were able to accomplish. This year I was especially proud of the **Compassion Camp** we put on and our ability to still keep connected with many people even without being able to be in person. Wishing all of our St. James family a happy and healthy 2021!

Godly Play Schedule January

January 3rd: Epiphany

In this lesson, we remember the arrival of the Magi in Bethlehem. We will recall together all the weeks in Advent as we had before Christmas but give special attention to the final purple candle, the one that represents the three kings. We will stop here and pay attention to what the three gifts were and what they symbolize as gifts for a baby who is the Messiah.

January 10th: Holy Baptism

In this lesson, we learn that Baptism is full initiation by water and the Holy Spirit into the Church. For Christians, this rite is the gateway into the family of families we call the Church. We ask the children to remember or look forward to the day of their baptism by lighting candles from the light of the Christ Candle since this is also the day they receive their "light."

January 17th: Parable of the Good Shepherd

In this lesson we hear the parable of the Good Shepherd, in which the shepherd searches for his one lost sheep, leaving the other ninety-nine to do so. This parable is often considered more of an identity statement than a parable.

January 24th: Parable of the Good Samaritan

The Parable of the Good Samaritan. Jerome Berryman says that "it is important for children to encounter parables during childhood so they can develop the ability to hear with their own ears what Jesus was communicating when he spoke in parables." Our parable boxes use 2-dimensional materials to help reiterate that these are Jesus's words and stories to us. The wondering questions used for parable lessons are designed to encourage children to see that there are deeper meanings in the parables than what they might initially encounter.

SEASON'S GREETINGS FROM ST. JAMES MISSION AND SOCIAL ACTION TEAM

A message from Carol Dellecker, Elder

To brighten your day during these dark winter days, I'd like to share several greetings we've received from our mission partners that you, the people of St James Presbyterian, have generously supported in 2020. Thank you.

Local Missions

Whatcom Peace and Justice Center: "The core of our work is grounded in values of nonviolence and solidarity. Heading into 2021, we plan to continue orienting ourselves around principles of community care."

Habitat for Humanity in Whatcom County: 8 families are moving into Telegraph Road Townhomes! This coming year, Habitat has four more homes to build on Telegraph and one in Sudden Valley.

Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault Services (DVSAS): "Thank you for your support."

Northwest Youth Services: "We have been helping unhoused youth access essential services all year and we are grateful for every way that you have 'shown up' for our community."

Skookum Kids: "Your financial support repeats the sounding joy for children in need all year long."

Whatcom Dispute Resolution Center: "Thank you from the bottom of our hearts for choosing to support us as we engage in some of the most significant and urgent challenges our community has ever faced."

National Missions

National Farm Worker Ministry: "To come together for justice for farmworkers - fighting anti-immigration policies and legislation, racism, and for fair wages, dignity and basic worker health and safety protections."

Presbyterian Disaster Assistance: "Your gift blesses those who walk the hard road toward recovery, letting them know they are not alone."

International - Presbyterian World Mission

Tyler, Rochelle & Mphatso Houm Family - Presbyterian World Mission, Malawi - "We are sheltering in place in Louisville, KY while working remotely. Please pray for the country of Malawi, its government, its leaders, its students, and its future."

Doug Dicks, Associate of Ecumenical Partnerships serving in Israel and Palestine: "With thanks and gratitude for your generous support of my work and ministry this past year."

Farsijana Adeney-Risakotta, Mission co-worker serving in Indonesia: "Thank you for supporting Farsijana's work at Duta Wacana Christian University in Yogyakarta."



Photo credit: Habitat for Humanity/KCLT recently completed 8 new Telegraph Road townhomes - now ready for occupancy!

RETURNING TO ‘NORMAL’

By Susan Diemont-Conwell, Chair, St. James Reopening Task Force



A vaccine is on the way! After months of worry, this news gives us hope. But what does this news mean for St. James? When can we get back to normal?

The practical reality is that it's going to be some months before a significant portion of our population has been vaccinated—possibly into the summer. And the scientific reality is that engaging in indoor activities remains among the riskiest of behaviors when it comes to this virus.

While the State of Washington allows us to resume certain church and building activities, it doesn't mean we should, especially given our demographics and this winter's surge in cases. In addition to not wanting to lose a single person at St. James to COVID-19, we also do not want to add to the burden on medical providers and our local hospital.

Masks, reducing the number of people in a room and social distancing do help reduce the risk of exposure from the virus, but these mitigation measures do not eliminate risk. Until the vaccine is widely in use, no guideline or procedure we can implement at St. James is 100% foolproof in eliminating your risk of exposure while in the church building at St. James.

So what does that mean for getting back to “normal”? It means that, given the winter surge, we go slowly. And it means that we give grace to Session members, staff, and committee chairs, who have been charged with implementing our reopening guidelines and making decisions regarding when to continue certain church and building activities. The decisions they make can mean the difference between life and death. Though we desperately want to get back to some semblance of normal, we want to make sure we are doing everything we can to protect the people of St. James—even if that means waiting for a little.

TIME FOR UPDATES: 2021 ST. JAMES DIRECTORY



Hello, Friends and Members of St. James,

The Membership Committee is crawling out of their LONG, QUIET winter to find HOPE in an early Spring. We look forward to the day it is once again safe to gather, share stories, laugh, and sing. Our Directory is one simple connection tool available to us. Would you please notify the church at: office@saintjamespres.org of any changes in your address, email, or phone contacts. We will be rerunning our last year's Directory photos. If you would like to submit a new photo to the same email link we will be happy to place it in the new copy.

Please send your changes in by **January 8, 2021**. This should allow us time to review and run our St. James Directory.
Thank you, the Membership Committee

ST. JAMES STAFF IS AT YOUR SERVICE

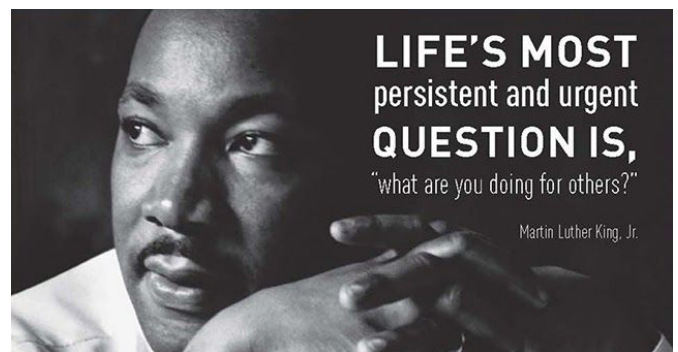
Pastor: The Rev. Seth J. Thomas, pastor@saintjamespres.org
 Children & Family Director: Tracy Caruso, tracy@saintjamespres.org
 Accompanist: Luke Arnold
 Treasurer: Marina McLeod, stjamestreasurer.bham@gmail.com
 Administrative Assistant: Shannon Laws, office@saintjamespres.org
 Teachers: Claire Alarid

SESSION

Moderator: The Rev. Seth J. Thomas
 Clerk of Session: Mark Beaty
 Building & Grounds: Aaron Caruso
 Christian Faith Formation: Sarah Condreay
 Finance & Stewardship: Lindsay Anderson
 Membership & Congregation Life: Susan Diemont-Conwell
 Mission & Social Action: Carol Dellecker
 Nominating: Jenny Sue LeSchander & Sarah Condreay
 Personnel: Faye Hill
 Trustees: Sarah Condreay, Mark Beaty, Aaron Caruso
 Worship & Music: Nebiyu Tesfa

DEACONS

Moderator: Alice Beaty
 Deacons Parish 1 Open- Alice Beaty
 Deacons Parish 2 Jean & Rick Seater
 Deacons Parish 3 Julie Keys, Carla Shafer
 Deacons Parish 4 Marlene Amman, Valerie McBeth
 Deacons Parish 5 Pam Gibson, Adam Beaty



Martin Luther King, Jr. Day January 18th

Worship Schedule- Join us for a streaming service

10:30 a.m. Worship is a LIVE Service Stream from our websites:

<https://saintjamespres.org/>

<https://www.facebook.com/saintjamespres/>

Office Hours:

Tuesday 9:00am - 12:00pm
 Thursday 9:00am - 2:00pm
 Friday 9:00am - 2:00pm

Enter via office door on 14th Street
 Sign in at the temperature station

January						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

1. New Year's Day
 5. Golden Globe Awards
 16. Get to Know Your Customers Day
 20. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day
 24. National Compliment Day
 25. Chinese New Year
 28. Data Privacy Day

UPCOMING EVENTS

ST. JAMES BOOK CLUB IN JANUARY

St. James Book Club is currently reading *The 100-year-Old Man Who Climbed Out the Window and Disappeared*. It is a 2009 comic novel by the Swedish author Jonas Jonasson. We will be meeting Monday evening January 18th @ 7:00. Email tracy@saintjamespres.org for the Zoom link.

FAMILY PROMISE SUPPORT OPPORTUNITIES

are available January 18-24, as St. James partners with our neighbors, Sacred Heart and Our Savior's to assist homeless families. The families are living in Interfaith housing during this time of Covid-19 and knowing specific needs in advance is difficult. However, if you are willing to provide dinner for one of the families please contact Gretchen Pfueller at gmpfueller@gmail.com for more information. She will have a list of needs soon.

JANUARY BIRTHDAYS & ANNIVERSARIES

1/1	Teresa Bowers	🎂
1/1	Susan Burkland	🎂
1/2	Ed Simmers and Jane Madden	💍
1/3	Kim Kendall	🎂
1/8	Marty Haines	🎂
1/8	Don Mellinger	🎂
1/11	Zach Engels	🎂
1/15	Karen Summers	🎂
1/15	Kyle Anderson	🎂
1/17	Dwayne Rogers	🎂
1/18	Genevieve Pfueller Roguski	🎂
1/23	Hailey Caruso	🎂
1/28	Tricia Bravener	🎂
1/31	Marlene Amman	🎂



Deadlines for church publications

Weekly bulletin: Wednesday, 2:00pm

Weekly email: Thursday, 2:00pm

Monthly "The Pulse": the 20th, 2:00pm

ST. JAMES CALENDAR

Please contact your Committee Chairperson or Group Coordinator to find out more about current offerings and times.

Until there is a vaccine that is widely available and widely used. The Reopening task force will remain in place throughout all four phases of reopening. The church guidelines and procedures will be updated as state, local and presbytery recommendations and guidance evolve.

PROGRAMS SHARING OUR FACILITY

AA Fairhaven Group
AA Men's Book Study Group
AA SOS Men's Group
Bellingham Com. Chorus
Bellingham Ukulele Group
Boy Scouts Troop 7
Happy Hour Al-Anon
Overeaters Anonymous
St. James Fitness
St. James Yoga
Linda's Tai Chi
WA Gender Alliance
Weavers Guild
You Are Not Alone (YANA)

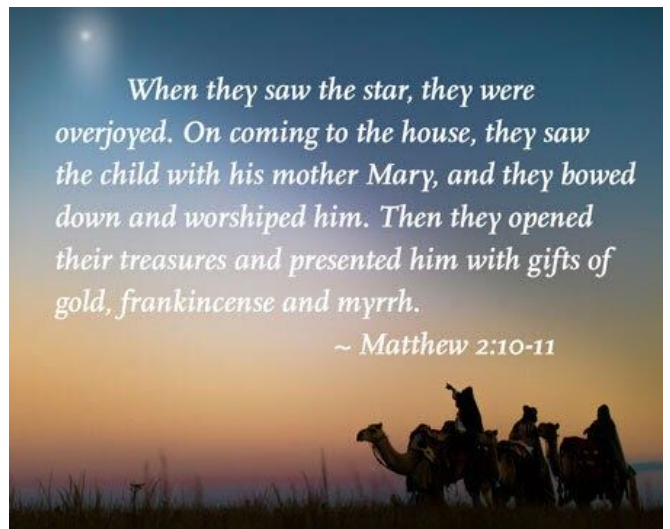
Bayside Co-op Preschool (in session)

Hawthorne Learning Solutions(in session)

Interfaith Coalition of Whatcom County(in office)

When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

~ Matthew 2:10-11



Epiphany of the Lord, January 6th



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