

The Joy of Gathering

These last few years, I have learned the deep joy of gathering with people. Being in other people's presence, whether they are dear friends or new acquaintances, is vital. Our ability to come together and share in experiences, support one another through life's transitions, and celebrate our collective journey is an invaluable marker of how we follow Jesus daily.

In recent years, sociologists, medical professionals, and journalists have chronicled the rise of a "loneliness epidemic" in the United States. According to an [NPR All Things Considered report](#) from May 2023, the U.S. Surgeon General reported that even before the COVID-19 pandemic, "about half of U.S. adults reported experiencing measurable levels of loneliness." Studies show we have fewer close relationships and weaker social bonds than previous generations, which leads researchers to conclude that we are drifting further apart. This impacts our health in many ways. The report added that the "physical consequences of poor connection can be devastating, including 29% increased risk of heart disease; a 32% increased risk of stroke; and a 50% increased risk of developing dementia for older adults."



The consequences of loneliness are immense; therefore, a renewed appreciation for and attention to the "art of gathering" is essential for us as we seek health and wholeness together as God's people. I notice the benefits of connection and social gathering when I look at my 8-year-old son or my 60-something-year-old parents. In each case, these people I love dearly are more apt to thrive when they connect with peers, friends, and family. Asher thirsts for friend connections during these summer months away from school. Gratefully, he's established a little group of buddies from his elementary school and participation at St. James that have forged strong bonds early in his life that bring the joy of connection. I see the same in my parents, as they share stories of connecting with other retired friends in their town, share the joy of gathering with us and our dear friends, and maintain lifelong connections with their siblings and extended family.

When we combine these studies with the statistical decline the church in America is experiencing, we see how important it is for us to maintain and strengthen the social bonds in communities like ours at St. James. Friends, we are incredibly fortunate to have a connected church body. I see it on Sunday mornings, when longtime members welcome fresh visitors to our community with open arms, helping them integrate and begin to participate. I see the joy of gathering at the Bellingham Bells' game (see the photo above), where young and old meet to enjoy the summer pastime. (I can attest that many St. James attendees did NOT watch the game this month but rather enjoyed playing and laughing together in the bleachers...as it should be).

Have you felt this sense of connection, or are you feeling disconnected? One of the many struggles the church in America faces is helping forge new relationships that create solid bonds of connection. We face an uphill fight — as social connections weaken, people start to distrust institutions and believe they do not belong anywhere. I find this example most poignant every year when we attend the Bellingham LGBTQIA+ Pride events — people are repeatedly (and pleasantly) surprised to see churches participating...which is great, but also tells the story that we have so long isolated ourselves from such gatherings that it is now remarkable when we do show up.

Historically, the church has been a force for strengthening and upholding social bonds, all facilitated by our practice of gathering. This August, during our 3-church Pulpit Swap, we will study Hebrews 10:23-25, which reminds us to "*not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing.*" The search for connection is an age-old issue for humanity. The people of Jesus celebrate our ability to gather and encourage it.

This month, I encourage you to (re)connect with a friend. Find a way to spend time together. Go for a walk, host a meal, go to a baseball game, sit together at church. Renew and forge new social bonds, for it is in these bonds of friendship that we are able to be the face of Jesus Christ to one another, which is, of course, part of our mission in the world.

Grace and peace,

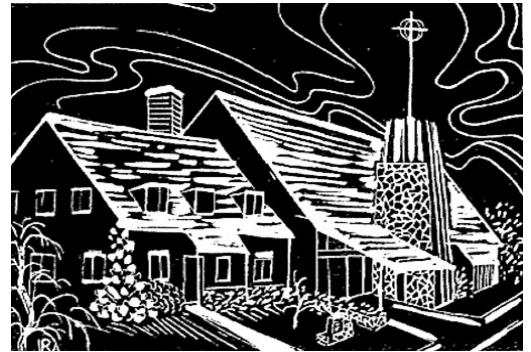


Pastor Seth

SESSION HIGHLIGHTS

submitted by Faye Hill, Clerk of Session

Here are the highlights for the Session Meeting on July 17



- This was a hybrid meeting of the Session, with three session members joining by Zoom, four session members and the Pastor/Moderator meeting in-person in the church lounge.
- The Session voted to excuse Session member, Teresa Bowers, and to welcome and grant the privilege of the floor to Deacon Representative, Alice Bailey, who joined the meeting via Zoom.
- Elder Jimmy Parks gave the devotions on the Beatitudes.
- Deacon Alice Bailey gave an update on the activities of the Board of Deacons. The picnic is planned for July 23rd at Squalicum Creek Park following worship. The deacons are working to develop ways to connect with members who have not been in touch with St. James since the Covid closure. The parish lists have been posted on the bulletin board in the hall outside the Lounge. Elder Maureen Kosa agreed to be the Session representative to the Board of Deacons meeting on August 20, 2023.
- Pastor Seth presented the financial report prepared by Treasurer, Katie Dunne which consisted of the Budget vs. Actuals for January through June, 2023. The Session reviewed and voted to accept the report.
- The minutes of the Session meeting on June 11, 2023 were approved by the Session.
- Elder Aaron Caruso, chairperson of Building and Grounds Committee, reported that some folks received electrical training at the most recent work party. The committee is beginning to gather information about replacing the windows and blinds in the Horizon Room.
- Elder Jimmy Parks reviewed the success of the Vacation Bible School held at St. James the last week of June.
- Elder Maureen Kosa shared information from the Mission Committee meeting this month. There will be a Habitat for Humanity volunteer opportunity workday on July 28th. She announced that the next Family Promise event will be on August 13th.
- The Session voted to approve vacation days for Pastor Seth Thomas July 24th through August 4th, with Jan Smith preaching on July 30th.
- Pastor Seth expressed his mutual concern with the deacons regarding older church members and homebound folks “slipping away”. He will work with the deacons on this.
- Pastor Seth reminded the Session about the sign-up sheets in the Horizon Room for communion servers.

FAMILY PROMISE SUPPORT OPPORTUNITY

The week of August 14, St. James will be providing meal kits (ingredients for specific meals) as we partner with our neighbors, Sacred Heart Catholic Church to assist homeless families living in Interfaith Coalition individual housing units. If you are willing to provide a dinner kit for one of the families, please contact Gretchen Pfueller at gmpfueller@gmail.com for more information. Gretchen will have a list of needs soon. Your obligation would be to purchase ingredients for a specific meal chosen by a family and delivered to our church refrigerator on Sunday, August 13.

CHRISTIAN FAITH FORMATION

Submitted by Tracy Caruso, Children & Family Ministry Director, tracy@saintjamespres.org



Greetings from the Director of Children and Family Ministries!

What a fun and busy month July was! After coming off of an amazing VBS we jumped into July with joining the Bellingham Pride festival and hosting a table there, had a great trip to the Bells baseball game, a fun night of youth group bowling, and a good gathering for our all-church picnic at Squalicum Park. It has been a great summer at St. James so far! If anyone has any photos of our St. James events please email them to Tracy.

August is looking to be a much slower month as we start to wrap up summer and head towards fall. Trail Mixers will be holding their August hike on August 26th at Fort Casey,

contact Ryan Knight for more info.

We will be holding a "Blessing of the backpacks" service on Sunday evening August 27th for all our students and teachers who will be returning to school after break. We hope the youth group will participate as it is in place of our regular youth group meeting.

The youth group will also be participating in the Whatcom Million Trees project work party on Saturday August 19th at 9:00am.

Godly Play will continue our People who Inspire series. We are always looking for volunteers to be door people or storytellers for our Godly Play classroom. If you are interested in learning more about Godly Play or volunteering, please talk with Tracy. We are hoping to get enough interest to hold a Godly Play training in late August or early September.

Godly Play for August:

August 6th Ruby Bridges

August 13th John Lewis

August 20th Bishop Barbara Harris

August 27th Work Day

UPCOMING EVENTS

BOOK CLUB

St. James book club is currently reading *The Dry* by Jane Harper, 'A riveting murder mystery and a beautifully wrought picture of a rural community under extreme pressure'. Copies of the book are available in the office. We will meet the third Monday in August, Monday August 21st, at 7:00pm via zoom. Contact Tracy for the zoom link.

TRAIL MIXERS

Date: August 26th

Location: Fort Casey State Park, Coupeville, WA Time/Plan: Meet at church at 9:30 AM. This is a full day trip to Fort Casey. This one is particularly fun for kids of all ages. Fort Casey is a really cool fort we can explore. There is a beach, lighthouse and short walks/hikes to do together. Pack lunch. Possible stop for dinner on the way home. Bring a Discover Pass if you have one.

Contact Ryan with any questions or suggestions.

Ryan Knight

360-798-1819

knight.ryanp@gmail.com

ST. JAMES STAFF IS AT YOUR SERVICE

Pastor: The Rev. Dr. Seth J. Thomas, pastor@saintjamespres.org

Children & Family Ministry Director: Tracy Caruso, tracy@saintjamespres.org

Music Director: Ta Wei Tsai, music@saintjamespres.org

Treasurer: Katie Dunne, stjamestreasurer.bham@gmail.com

Administrative Ministry Assistant: Sharon King, office@saintjamespres.org

SESSION OF ST. JAMES

Tess Bowers
Aaron Caruso
Sarah Condreay
Faye Hill (Clerk of Session)
Maureen Kosa
Andrew McLaurin
Jimmy Parks
Nebiyu Tesfa

DEACONS

Deacons Parish 1 Merry Thomas*, Alice Bailey
Deacons Parish 2 Pam Gibson, Judy Buchan
Deacons Parish 3 Julie Keyes, Carla Shafer
Deacons Parish 4 Valerie McBeth, Claudia Allan
Deacons Parish 5 Pam Gibson, Adam Beaty
Deacons Parish 6 Kirsten Oliver, Amy Morriss*
* Deacon Co-Moderators

AUGUST BIRTHDAYS & ANNIVERSARIES

8/4	Corenia Murphy	🎂
8/5	Gary Culbertson	🎂
8/6	Tim and Wendy Crandall	💖
8/7	Jeanne Uhles	🎂
8/10	Jeff King	🎂
8/12	Wilma French	🎂
8/13	Jill Hoyt	🎂
8/13	Rick and Jean Seater	💖
8/16	Megan Pfueller Melrose	🎂
8/17	Jimmy Parks	🎂
8/17	Randy Pries	🎂
8/19	Bill Read	🎂
8/21	Dwayne and Karen Rogers	💖
8/24	Rick Seater	🎂
8/25	Mary van der Veen	🎂
8/25	Wilma and Dale French	💖
8/26	Luke Arnold	🎂
8/28	Marilyn Monahan	🎂

Worship Schedule - Online and In-Person, Sundays at 10:30 a.m.

Live streaming at:

<https://saintjamespres.org/live>

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

Church Office Hours:

9:00am - 2:00pm, Monday - Thursday

Add your request to the St. James Prayer Chain

Contact your Deacon or St. James at:

360-733-1325 | office@saintjamespres.org



Deadlines for church publications

Weekly bulletin: Wednesday, 2:00pm

Weekly email: Thursday, 2:00pm

Monthly "the Pulse": the 25th, 2:00pm