

A Good and Generous New Year

As I write this article, thinking about the New Year, I keep thinking about this question that the followers of John the Baptist asked: *What are we to do?*

And now, looking ahead, even beyond the Season of Christmas, I'm filled with wonder (and concern) about how we do the good work we are to do. We continue to live in times of great injustice and marginalization, which leads us to draw in, hunker down, and protect what we have. This impulse makes sense. But John's teaching reminds us to be generous and giving of what we have.



Be good to one another. Not only in how we share our time and talents, which are gifts we must always steward well. But beyond this, can we be generously good to one another in this new year? How do we do this? How do we “be good” to one another? Well, here are a few ideas.

Be Present – First, we practice generosity by paying attention and maintaining presence wherever we are. I'm reminded of the readerboard statement I pass every day: “The best place to be is here.” By being present, we can attend to the needs of others that God has placed in our lives. Be present.

Be Humble – This means swallowing our pride and forgoing the need to be right. This is humility. Be humble. Give others the benefit of the doubt, trusting that each person you meet is doing the very best they can with what they have. Remember when you felt like you weren't enough, but someone helped you remember how loved you were. Be humble.

Be Kind – In polarizing times, we can still be kind. When we disagree, we can still be kind. We can treat each person we meet with dignity and respect as beloved children of God. In all things, we can have a consistent ethic of kindness, regardless of the circumstances. To be kind, even when the world tells us to be perfect, correct, or on top...well, it's countercultural and changes lives. Be kind.

Presence, humility, and kindness change the world and transform small communities like ours. In the year ahead, we must practice these things: Be present to what God puts in your daily path. Be humble, accepting your limitations and the capacity of others. Be kind, offering respect and dignity to all people, regardless of whether you like them, agree with them, or think you know more than them.

How will we endure times of struggle, division, and the shifting sands of culture, politics, government, and public life? We will push on by modeling the way of Jesus, who taught us to love our neighbors (and our enemies) and to be generous with one another.

Grace and peace,

Pastor Seth

CHRISTIAN FAITH FORMATION

Submitted by Tracy Caruso, Children & Family Ministry Director



December was an amazing and fun-filled month and a perfect ending to an amazing 2024.

We started with a fantastic Advent festival where everyone enjoyed some excellent soups and bread, decorated cookies, crafted, and enjoyed each other's company and fellowship.

The Pub Theology group met for the last time in 2024 and reports that it will keep meeting in the New Year. Stay tuned for the upcoming meeting times and places.

Our Godly Play class revisited our Advent

series. It was wonderful to see the excitement build as the students remembered the stories and contributed their wonderings and joy of the season to each lesson. Our two adults-only Godly Play sessions were a wonderful time for adults to cross the threshold of the Godly Play classroom and do some wondering of our own.

Thank You to everyone who donated to the Holiday Joy program this year. The youth group volunteered at the Holiday Joy market, where 121 families with 308 children were served! This is the first year we had the youth group work at the event where families got to come and pick out gifts for their children, so it was really good for them to see where their efforts were going.



We had a great caroling event at Rosewood Villa. The staff and residents there were very thankful for the joy brought by our singing.

We closed out Advent with our annual Christmas Eve candlelight service. As usual, we had a beautiful service with lots of joy and participation from the children. It truly is a perfect way to celebrate the Mystery that is Christmas.

As another year closes, I reflect on how grateful I am to have been called to this position at St. James. Our St. James family is such an amazing, supportive, and faithful group; my family and I are so blessed to be a part of it. Wishing you all a happy and blessed 2025!



GODLY PLAY SCHEDULE FOR JANUARY

January 5th – Circle of the Church Year

January 19th – Parable of the Good Shepherd

January 12th – Holy Baptism

January 26th – Parable of the Good Samaritan

FINANCE UPDATE

submitted by Andrew McLaurin, Chair of Finance

Happy New Year! Although we don't have final numbers for 2024, we are encouraged to see our pledges nearing budgeted levels. There still appears to be a shortfall in general offerings, but it is less than expected. We have been able to fund our community outreach and support commitments. Thank you for your faithful tithing.

We will be finalizing the budget for 2025 in the next few weeks. Once our session approves it it will be presented to the congregation at the end of January. There is still time to submit a pledge if you haven't submitted one yet.

We have been committed to supporting our staff financially as well as spiritually. Our Presbytery has set a COLA of 4% for 2025. We are building this into our budget. Many of our expenses are holding steady; however, we anticipate utilities and some supplies to have increased. This forecasting makes the budget process challenging. Please know we take great care in handling the resources provided.

We are optimistic that our finances will continue to be strong. We share your goal to be good stewards of what God provides. Thank you for your continued support of St. James Presbyterian Church and our many ministries.

Thank you again for your faithfulness!

Andrew

GIVING TO ST. JAMES

If you have any questions regarding the finances of Saint James Presbyterian Church, please feel free to contact Stefany Ness at treasurer@saintjamespres.org

Aside from utilizing contact-free offering on Sunday morning, you can 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: <https://saintjamespres.churchcenter.com/giving>

2. **Mail-In Donations or Pledges:** You can mail your pledges and gifts to the church.

Saint James Presbyterian Church
910 14th Street
Bellingham, WA 98225

SESSION NOTES - DECEMBER 2024

Submitted by Pastor Seth Thomas, Session Moderator

(minutes are available upon request from the church office)

- Notes from Session on December 15, 2024
- Julie Keyes reported from the St. James Deacons that the Fall Luncheon went well!
- Poinsettia sales were very popular this year, thanks to Cheryl McGregor for coordinating. Deacons will distribute to members in their parishes who cannot attend in person.
- St. James' new Treasurer, Stefany Ness, continues settling in and crafting needed reports. Year-to-date giving is down compared to budgeted projections. Session and the Finance committee are planning for 2025 with this in mind.
- The Christian Faith Formation Committee chaired by Jimmy Parks updated the Session on plans for the St. James youth to serve at the Holiday Joy lunch in December.
- Mission and Social Action ended their yearly disbursements. They completed the Road2Home Village stocking project again this year with additional support from the St. James Exercise group. Missions will be developing an updated giving pie chart for 2025.
- The Nominating Committee received a report on the current status of incoming officer nominations for Deacons and Elders in 2025. The congregational meeting for receiving those is set for January 5, 2025.
- The Annual Congregational Meeting will be on Sunday, January 26, 2025.
- Finance Committee Session members reviewed account balances and were reminded to submit each committee's budget request for 2025.
- Ralph Buchan reported that the Personnel Committee is progressing in reviewing staff job descriptions and finalizing the 2024 Annual Reviews.
- On behalf of the Worship Committee, Pastor Seth reported that Jessica Parks would lead a *Lessons & Carols* Service on December 29, 2024, the week of Christmas.
- Planning for Communication, Technology, Safety, and Tenant Task Forces is underway for 2025. Any interested members are to contact Pastor Seth for info.



SESSION NEEDS

The St. James Session is still seeking 2 Elder Nominations for the incoming class. In particular, we are seeking a new Clerk of Session. Please speak with Pastor Seth or Carla Shafer for more info.

ST. JAMES WRITERS CIRCLE

St. James Writers Circle is a gathering of members and friends who are writing (or would like to be) prose, poems, novels, short stories. We are open to all genres and topics, and encouraging of spiritual and other content that is an authentic reflection of your personal views and explorations of ideas. We will meet to support each other's writing and provide resources. Meetings at the church will be at 10 AM on the first Thursday of each month, (Nov. 7, Dec. 5, Jan. 2 and so on) and on Zoom on the 3rd Wednesday of each month at 7 PM (Nov 20, Dec. 18, Jan. 15 and so on). Writing Circle facilitators are Maureen Kosa and Carla Shafer.

MISSION & SOCIAL ACTION

Submitted by Maureen Kosa, Chair

On Friday, December 20th 40 stockings were delivered from St. James to the Gardenvue Tiny Home Village here in Bellingham. The village is managed by Road2Home which is a local Bellingham non-profit. The village provides housing case management and places an emphasis on transitioning residents to permanent housing. This is the third year that St. James has delivered stockings to brighten the holidays for the residents. This year we were able to fill the stockings through a generous donation from our St. James Fitness class.

Thank you to Gena Gustafson, Gretchen Pfueller, and Ray Dellecker for shopping, to Tracy Caruso, Gretchen Pfueller, and Gena Gustafson for assembling the stocking, and to Ray and Carol Dellecker for helping to deliver the stockings.



SUNDAY TECH AND WEBSITE HELP NEEDED

In 2025, we would like to expand our offerings through the St. James church website. We are looking for a team to help review our current website content and tools and help develop the next version, hopefully launching in Summer 2025. Talk with Pastor Seth to get involved.

Additionally, we are looking for more folks to help run cameras and sound for our online service streaming each Sunday. YOU can do it...and WE can train you! This involves arriving at the church by 10:00 to set up and live streaming during the regular worship service. Email pastor@saintjamespres.org if you can help!

SIGN UP HERE FOR USHERS, COMMUNION, LECTORS & OFFERING COUNTERS

We *need* ushers, lectors, offering counters, and communion servers! The following links will take you to an online signup where you can sign up for Sundays that work with your schedule and receive an automatic reminder a few days before your service. If you have questions, please contact Sharon at office@saintjamespres.org.

- Usher: <https://tinyurl.com/UshersStJames>
- Lector: <https://tinyurl.com/LectorStJames>
- Offering Counters: <https://tinyurl.com/OfferingCountersStJames>
- Communion Servers: <https://tinyurl.com/CommunionServerStJames>

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: Leah Bruno, music@saintjamespres.org

Treasurer: Stefany Ness, treasurer@saintjamespres.org

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



SESSION OF ST. JAMES

Tess Bowers*
 Ralph Buchan*
 Aaron Caruso*
 Sarah Condreay
 Maureen Kosa
 Andrew McLaurin
 Carla Shafer (interim clerk**)
 Jimmy Parks
 Nebiyu Tesfa
 Pastor Seth Thomas, Moderator

*Church Trustees **Clerk of Session



DEACONS

Deacons Parish 1 – Merry Thomas*, Alice Bailey
 Deacons Parish 2 – Judy Buchan, Gena Gustafson
 Deacons Parish 3 – Buzz & Holly* Hagshenas,
 Carla Shafer
 Deacons Parish 4 – Valerie McBeth, Claudia Allan
 Deacons Parish 5 – Pam Gibson, Julie Keyes
 Deacons Parish 6 – Kirsten Oliver

* Deacon Co-Moderators

Church Office Hours:
 9:00am - 2:00pm, Monday - Thursday

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

Live streaming at:

<https://saintjamespres.org/live>

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

JANUARY BIRTHDAYS & ANNIVERSARIES

1/1	Teresa Bowers	🎂
1/1	Buzz Hagshenas	🎂
1/2	Ed Simmers and Jane Madden	💕
1/5	Kat DeVaney	🎂
1/8	Marty Haines	🎂
1/11	Zach Engels	🎂
1/14	Holly Hagshenas	🎂
1/15	Karen Summers	🎂
1/15	Kyle Anderson	🎂
1/17	Dwayne Rogers	🎂
1/17	Sam King	🎂
1/18	Genevie Pfueller Roguski	🎂
1/23	Hailey Caruso	🎂
1/28	Tricia Bravener	🎂

PROGRAMS SHARING OUR FACILITY

AA Fairhaven Group
AA Grateful Hearts Women's Group
AA Men's Book Study Group
AA SOS Men's Group
AA Meditation Group
Bayside Co-op Preschool
Bellingham Community Chorus
Bellingham Ukulele Group
Boy Scouts Troop 7
Happy Hour Al-Anon
Liberation Yoga
Linda's Tai Chi
Little Sapling Music
Overeaters Anonymous
St. James Fitness
The Table Church
Whatcom Weavers Guild

Deadlines for church publications

Weekly bulletin: Wednesday, 2:00pm

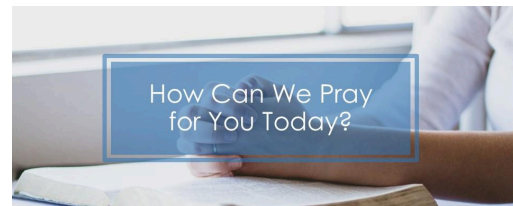
Weekly email: Thursday, 2:00pm

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

Add your request to the St. James Prayer Chain

Contact your Deacon or St. James at:

360-733-1325 | office@saintjamespres.org





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