

NOVEMBER 2024



The Evangel

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This November edition of the Evangel is delayed slightly. I imagine that, when you read this a few days after I write it, the world will still be spinning. Jesus will still be Lord, and for the moment, life will be as it has been recently. I want to share some thoughts on the outcome of the election that I hope every single one of our members can read and find some clarity and direction.

One of the greatest gifts of our parish is the diversity of thought and opinion among us. We do not all look at the world the same way. I have been in communities of various ilk where content and patterns of thought were monotone. Those places were not only dull but unimaginative, uninspired, and wholly lacking of any urge to grow beyond one's comfort level. Despite the sometimes warranted self-criticism we have at St. Stephen's that we do not like change (which is true of nearly every community), to a person we paradoxically have a desire to grow and better ourselves. On top of God's Spirit which sustains us, this desire is one of the great sources that generates the energy that exists in our community. Call it the scientific inclination, the desire to be good citizens, or the plethora of Type A personalities in our midst. We share the common trait to learn.

I want you to hold this shared desire to improve ourselves in front of you as you read these next few words. The obvious challenge of an intellectually and spiritually diverse church in our case is that, well, we do not all look at the world the same way. Specifically in this case, for those who supported Donald Trump, they are likely elated that their candidate won. They certainly have every right to be thankful for it, and it is always a good and delightful thing to celebrate the potential for a better future for our country.

But a common human mistake is that we make assumptions about why people who don't see eye to eye with us believe as they do; in this case, why they support a different candidate or have a different political philosophy. Over and above this, why do they see Donald Trump's win as a blow to our country's future? As such, it may be hard to truly comprehend why those who supported Kamala Harris woke up Wednesday morning angry, hurting, or utterly despondent. And it is so easy to dismiss these reactions as being overly sensitive (a "snowflake"), crazy, or "lib wokeness", to use the very words I've heard spoken on social media and in person by people I know very well. As a college friend of mine posted on Facebook to any random listener who happened to disagree with him, "You had your four years, now we have ours" (I removed quite a few expletives from the original quote, but you get the point).

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Much of the angst experienced by those upset at the outcome is due to things that President Trump has himself said – not secondhand, but things that have been recorded on video. To be fair, I’ve never seen a political race where disparaging comments toward someone or some group of people haven’t been said by multiple candidates regardless of their party affiliation. These comments are never justified from our perspective as followers of Jesus, especially from those who are seeking to lead. In this case, several of President Trump’s comments have been addressed in a demeaning way towards immigrants, women, LGBTQ+ people, and minorities. A significant number of people across the board have interpreted these comments in a menacing way, and what’s more, people who hold racist, misogynistic, or homophobic viewpoints have latched onto these comments to embolden them to carry out their perspectives in the public square through their words and actions. (I should add that this is not theoretical; I have had at least a dozen parishioners here and at my last church come to me who were directly targeted by verbal and even physical attacks based on their inclusion in one or more of the aforementioned groups).

Some defend these comments by saying he speaks things to gain shock value. When I hear this, I think of the parables of Jesus, many of which were also spoken to elicit shock value. “Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:26). I think we can all agree that Jesus does not tell us to literally hate the people around us. But the alternative is not to dismiss the passage completely but to understand that there is a deep truth abiding behind this – in that case, the gospel itself is worth more than even our deepest relationships and what we value most in this life. As such, comments made by a leader may not always be taken at face value, but there is a deeper meaning which, in some of these statements, is far darker than what Jesus is saying in his harsh statement.

I say all of these things firmly entrenched in my belief that partisanship has no place in the life of the church. I will never publicly endorse a candidate, even as a private citizen, because my life as a citizen is deeply intertwined with my life as a priest (other clergy certainly can adopt a different philosophy, but this happens to be mine). If I speak of anything “political” in an official capacity, it is my criticism of both of our major political parties and our government institutions for their abject failure to provide common-sense solutions for our economic and social disparity problems as a country. But I stress that partisan is far different than political. Jesus was deeply concerned with the lives of human beings not only in their personal relationship to Him but also in how they live among each other – the very definition of political. When politicians utter statements that, intentionally or not, demonize certain aspects of the population, the church is called to speak out against it because it stands in complete opposition to God’s providence of uniting all peoples under the banner of Christ’s grace and love.

I was very proud of this community on Election Night when a small group of our parishioners gathered for a service of Evening Prayer to offer petitions for the life of our nation and our future together. While I never ask what someone’s political affiliation is, if I’ve gotten to have a couple of substantive conversations with you, I can probably guess what your leanings are. I looked out and noted that the people who had gathered were probably evenly split by my guess between people who leaned Republican or Democrat. At the end of it, in the midst of our differing concerns for the outcome of the election, I heard many conversations that spoke of our love for our country and our deep desire for taking care of all of its people, especially those who differ from us.

We are called to begin exercising this care by loving and respecting the people immediately around us, even and especially if we disagree with them. It works both ways. Those upset by the election outcome cannot make the dangerous assumption that everyone who voted for Donald Trump is a bad person or of decrepit moral values, as I’ve heard said lately. It doesn’t mean a person has to ask them why they voted that way or even engage on that topic at all. But I imagine we will find that many of the people at St. Stephen’s who have supported

President Trump are voting for him out of their love and concern for our country. Conversely, I ask those who are pleased with the outcome to be perceptive and responsive in a Christ-like way to the angst of those who are not pleased for the reasons I've already given – with special attention to the fact that they also have a deep love of their country and also share a deep and abiding faith in Christ with you.

I can't guarantee that people beyond our community had the same noble intentions in voting for either Vice-President Harris or the Former-President Trump. But I can guarantee that, in addition to our own members, we are undoubtedly going to receive visitors in these next few weeks who are looking for a spiritual refuge out of fear of what comes next. When they do come, we are not to dismiss their fear or make light of it, for again, the words which have been spoken in the political arena have struck deep wounds in many people. I repeat what I said at the outset: our congregation, in its diversity of thought, shares a common desire to grow beyond where we are now. We will be challenged to grow in new directions spiritually as we prepare ourselves to live fully into the motto of our denomination: "The Episcopal Church welcomes you." This stretching of ourselves begins with compassion, even if we can't fully understand or agree with a differing perspective. It results in authentic community that recognizes God in each person and, even when our passions may arise from different places, asserts a confident hope for all our people that they have a place at **THE table of the Lord**.

Since I returned to you in 2020, we have attained growth and vitality in spite of COVID, numerous and notable illnesses and deaths in our community, and the economic challenges that many of our people continue to face. I implore God to guide us, and I implore you to prepare yourselves for these new challenges that lie ahead. As the church has always become stronger in moments of trial, every single one of us will be sharpened for the Lord's work. This time, the work will be making sure that everyone can hear a word of compassion, understanding, and forgiveness. The Church always rises to declare its hope above the troubles of the world, but it can only do it when its people make the effort to cling to that hope found in Christ and make it known to others as if it is the greatest gift we can imagine. This deeper truth of Jesus' words on the gospel will be what sustains us as we continue to grow into Christ's image.

I am thankful for each and every one of you and the work we do together in Christ's name. Let us attentively and empathetically listen to one another, and in every sense of the communion we share together, be given boldness by the Holy Spirit to be the Church for one another and for a divided world.

Bailey

THE RIGHT REVEREND SEAN ROWE

The Most Rev. Sean Rowe marked the beginning of his ministry as presiding bishop in a chapel rather than a cathedral. In a scaled-down, livestreamed service, Rowe was installed as the 28th Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church on November 2 in the Episcopal Church Center's Chapel of Christ the Lord at the church's Manhattan headquarters. It was also livestreamed to close to 20,000 viewers in homes, churches and dioceses in the United States and around the world.

The service was a break with a tradition that dated back to 1938, when the installation service for the Rt. Rev. Henry St. George Tucker, the 19th presiding bishop, was held in the still-uncompleted Washington National Cathedral. In 1941, General Convention established Washington National Cathedral as the seat of the Presiding Bishop, and Rowe will be formally seated in the cathedral there in the coming months.

The Holy Eucharist and the Investiture of The Rt. Rev. Sean Rowe as Twenty-Eighth Presiding Bishop can be found on YouTube-The Episcopal Church.

GRATITUDE

Gratitude as defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary is:
“the state of being grateful, thankfulness.”

As we move into November and December, we often focus more on thankfulness than other times of the year. Here are some of the things your fellow parishioners are grateful for....

The freedom to represent ideals

Fall/Autumn weather

The people of this parish

Feeling good on a beautiful day

Being here (at St. Stephen's)

People opening my door

Seeing Pat Swinney on her feet!

Family, health, world peace

For the freedom to choose

My parish family

God's many blessings

THANKSGIVING DAY MEAL AND SERVICE RETURNS!

Do you want to lighten your cooking load for Thanksgiving this year while enjoying fellowship with your St. Stephen's friends? St. Stephen's is excited to once again host our Thanksgiving Day (Nov. 28) meal open to all St. Stephen's parishioners and their invited guests. The festivities will begin with a Thanksgiving Day Eucharist at 10:00 AM followed by the meal at 11:00 AM. The event will be sponsored by Parish Life and hosted by Fr. Bailey's family. The main courses (turkey and ham) will be provided; each participant will be invited to bring a side dish to share.

This event is a great opportunity for you to both celebrate with your St. Stephen's community AND to invite someone who may not have a place to celebrate this year. We hope that this event would be an outreach to welcome those not part of our church to find a reason to truly give thanks with our community this year.

So if you haven't made your holiday plans yet, please mark it on your calendar and join us! Sign-up sheets are available on the website..



NOVEMBER OUTREACH FOCUS: BLANKETS+

It's November. Think Blankets.

Our special Outreach project for November has a two-part focus: (1) funding the Blankets+ Campaign conducted by Church Women United for Church World Service (CWS) and (2) collecting new or clean, gently used bedding for the Ecumenical Storehouse in Oak Ridge.

For over 70 years, St. Stephen's has supported CWS in providing blankets and other relief to victims of disaster and displacement around the world. Blankets can be used as bedding, cloaks, totes to carry belongings, overhead shelter, privacy curtains, and even floor covering. Following hurricanes Helene and Milton, CWS quickly delivered 3750 blankets, in addition to 4196 emergency cleanup buckets, 7480 hygiene kits, and 500 menstrual hygiene kits in Florida and North Carolina.

The Outreach Committee has set aside \$300.00 for the project and invites parishioners to help. Every \$10 will buy a specially made large, durable blanket suitable for the recipients' climate. The loose offering on the second, third, and fourth Sundays in November will be dedicated to the Blankets+ campaign. You may also donate online (<https://www.ststephensor.org/>) or send a check to St. Stephen's through November; either way, please include the memo "For Blankets."

Blankets and clean bedding for Ecumenical Storehouse may be put in marked containers which will be found in the Narthex and the hospitality area.

FLOWER AND AMBRY CANDLE CHARTS

The 2025 flower and ambry candle charts are now posted on the bulletin board outside of the parish office. You may now sign up for the new year. Flower costs for two arrangements is \$85.00. The cost for ambry candle is \$5.00. This is a lovely way to contribute to our worship services.

What and Why Ambry Candle?

An "ambry candle" in the Episcopal Church is a candle that burns continuously beside the ambry (a small cupboard in the sanctuary) to signify the presence of the reserved sacrament, which is the consecrated bread and wine kept for the sick or those unable to attend communion; essentially, the lit candle indicates that Jesus is present in the reserved sacrament within the ambry.

The ambry candle is extinguished on Maundy Thursday during the stripping of the Altar, symbolizing the moment when Jesus' physical presence is no longer visible on earth. The candle remains unlit (darkened - symbolic of the apparent victory of darkness over light) until the first celebration of the Resurrection at the Easter Vigil.

The Sanctuary lamp utilizes a seven day candle. It is first lighted from the "New Fire" struck at the Easter Vigil for the Paschal Candle and then transferred to the candle in the Sanctuary Lamp. Each week, as the candle is exchanged for a new one, the "Light" is also transferred.

LOOKING AHEAD

As we move into the busiest time of the year, take this opportunity to mark your calendars so you don't miss any of the opportunities for worship and fellowship.

CELTIC SERVICE

On **November 10**, St. Stephen's hosts the monthly Celtic Service at 5:00 p.m.

A CONVERSATION WITH THE CAMINO PILGRIMS

After the 10:30 service on Sunday **November 17**, our pilgrims will have a short presentation about their week spent in Spain walking the Camino de Santiago de Compostela. Beverages and Tarta de Santiago (St. James' Cake) will be served. Please come be a part of our Camino conversation.

THANKSGIVING AT ST. STEPHEN'S

Please see the separate article on Page 4.

ADVENT WREATHS

Between the services on **December 1**, all the "fixins" for making your own Advent Wreaths will be available in the Parish Hall. If you have greenery (pine, holly, yew), please bring some with you.

CHILDREN'S PAGEANT AND COOKIE EXCHANGE

On **December 8** the Children's Nativity Pageant will be held during the 10:30 service. It will be followed by a Cookie Exchange in the Parish Hall. Please bring at least 10 ziplock baggies of 6-cookies each for the exchange along with 1-2 dozen extra cookies for all to enjoy.

LESSONS AND CAROLS

The Lessons and Carols service will be held on **December 15** at 6:00 p.m. It will be preceded by a catered dinner in the Parish Hall beginning at 5:00 p.m..

THE BISHOP IS COMING!

Bishop Cole will be with us on **December 22** for Baptism and Confirmation at the 10:30 a.m. service. He will also preach at the 8:00 a.m. service. Brunch with the Bishop in the Parish Hall will be served beginning at 9:00 a.m. Enjoy coffee and cake with the Bishop and Confirmands after the 10:30 a.m. service.

ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS SERVICES SCHEDULE

December 1 (Advent 1)

8 am – Holy Eucharist

Advent wreath making – between services

10:30 am – Holy Eucharist

December 8 (Advent 2)

8 am – Holy Eucharist

10:30 – Christmas pageant with Holy Eucharist

December 12 (Thursday)

7 pm – Blue Christmas

December 15 (Advent 3)

8 am – Holy Eucharist

10:30 am – Holy Eucharist

5 pm – Parish catered dinner

7 pm – Lessons and Carols

December 22 – (Advent 4 – Feast of St. Stephen)

Visitation from Bishop Brian Cole at both services

8 am – Holy Eucharist

10:30 am – Baptism/Confirmation with Holy Eucharist

December 24 – (Christmas Eve)

4 pm – Folk Mass/Holy Eucharist

Special Guest: Bishop Brian Cole, presider

Special musical leaders: The Missing Goats

10 pm – Carol singing; Holy Eucharist w/incense

December 25 (Christmas Day)

10 am – Holy Eucharist