

# The First Order

## St. Stephen's Parish

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Reflections

### Now, The New Year

One of my favorite hymns includes these words:

Now the silence, now the peace,  
Now the empty hands uplifted...  
Now the Spirit's visitation,  
Now the Son's epiphany;  
Now the Father's blessing,  
Now, now, now.

This is one of the ways that I use that 2 minute meditation time, after the Gospel. Let's face it, whether you are a priest or a lay person, getting into church is Work! Hang up your coat, grab that pal for a quick chat, use the bathroom, sip some coffee, grab the kids... we all know the drill. By the time we get to our seats, our hearts are racing, we're not focused, and the service takes off with or without us being fully present.

For me, and I hope for many of you, that silence is when I Arrive. It's just far enough into the service that I've forgotten the mad dash to get in. I find that if I can just sit for those 2 minutes and breathe, I'm able to move into the sermon and the rest of the morning in a more centered way.

What to DO during that silence? Good question.

You can simply sit and breathe. If you find yourself making a grocery list or writing an email in your mind, you can focus on counting your breaths. Every time your mind wanders away, start fresh with, "1...2....3...." This is actually a practice

monks use to focus, and it works because it's so simple.

You can also gently bring into your mind the faces or names of people you are praying for. Don't obsess about their surgery or diagnosis, but rather hold them in your mind's eye and in your heart, and send them thoughts of love and healing. Imagine seeing each one, and sending waves of hope or peace, and then gently move to another person.

Or, say a word silently on your in-breath, and another on your out-breath. Like "Receive....Now" or "Peace..... Now" or "Here.....Now".

Now the Silence, now the Peace, now the empty hands uplifted. Arrive, now.

love, Cricket +

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# Epiphany Pageant

This year we will celebrate the Epiphany and the arrival of the three kings on January 10th, giving us a full complement of characters for the Christmas Pageant on that Sunday at the 10:00 a.m. service. ALL children are invited to participate. Costumes will be given out in the Guild Room from 9:15 to 9:30 a.m. Please come for this delightful opportunity to recount the fullness of the Christmas story with our entire congregation.

## Did You Know?

- That **Tessa Langsdale** made the BART Honor Roll for the first trimester. Congratulations for keeping up the good work!
- That **Matt Reynolds** earned High Honors at Lee Middle and High School for the first quarter. Well done!

## We Get Letters

From **Karen Wallace, Executive Director Literacy Volunteers of Berkshire**

Dear Members of St. Stephen's,

Thank you so much for allowing Literacy Volunteers of Berkshire County to use the Dining Room for our recent International Dinner and Awards ceremony. This is a special occasion when our students, tutors, board, friends and families join together to celebrate the accomplishments of our students and dedication of our tutors. Since our students come from 24 countries, the potluck dinner had a wide variety of foods, such as Russian beet salad, Moroccan Chicken and American apple pie. It was a feast! We appreciate your sharing the Dining Room with us for such a special night.

## Micah Dinner: Celebrating Joan Evans!

On January 24th, Berkshire Interfaith Organizing (BIO) will honor local community members in their first Members In Community Action Honoree (MICAHA) Awards Dinner.

The MICAHA Award is to honor community members that reflect the Scripture that says...

**“And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”**

As you may have already heard, this year Joan Evans will be one of several MICAHA Honoree's celebrated among the member organizations. Joan has been a steadfast and faithful volunteer at St. Stephen's for many years. She is a regular counter, has helped with hospitality for countless events, coordinated the craft fair in years past, been our representative for the Thanksgiving baskets, organizing more corn and stuffing than we can possibly imagine and these are just a few. She gives of herself freely and exemplifies this passage from Micah.

The dinner will be held on Sunday, January 24, 2016; 4:30 - 7 pm (Snow Date: January 25th) at St. Mark's School. Tickets are still available for the dinner. However, in order to properly prepare for the dinner, ticket sales will close on January 18th. If you are interested in attending, please see either Susan Wojtasik or Paula Morey for ticket sales.

We are thrilled to be celebrating the wonderful gifts Joan continues to bring to St. Stephen's and the Pittsfield community. We hope you will join us for this celebratory event!



# Winterlight 2015

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." (Jer. 29:11)

During the week of December 26th- January 1st, 2016, nine youth from Pittsfield area high schools explored this passage during Winterlight 40. Winterlight, a youth retreat for high school students, has taken place for the last 40 years at Kanuga's Camp and Conference Center in Hendersonville, NC. Each year has a different theme. This year's theme was "Hope and a Future." Traveling to Kanuga early in the morning of December 26th, seven members from St. Stephen's, one from South Congregational and another from First Methodist, along with several other diocesan youth boarded the plane for Kanuga. For seven of our youth, this was their second time participating. Prior to leaving, each expressed their enthusiasm to reconnect with friends made during last year's retreat. "We can't wait!" Winterlight began with a day of snow tubing. The retreat ended as the community rang in the New Year with a Eucharistic service followed by a dance. Please look in our February newsletter, for pictures and stories from our young people about this event.

## Youth Meeting Times in January

On Friday, January 8th, high school youth will be invited to come back together for a meal and conversation about Winterlight and re-entry into school over dinner. On January 10th and 24th, we will gather following the services for conversation and an activity. More information about the specifics of these events will be forthcoming after the Christmas season.

# January

## Happy Birthday:

- 2 David Aldrich, Brianna Brennan (9), Cassidy Devitt (13)
- 3 Michael Connors, Kenneth Eddy
- 4 Andrea Appleton (a milestone!), Nancy Lamoureaux (a milestone!)
- 7 Reilly Cachat (9), Anthony Croce (14)
- 8 Gayle Casassa
- 9 Heather Digrigoli, Gwen Sears
- 10 Cathy Carchedi
- 11 John Culver, Molly Doyle, Mark Eddy
- 12 Hunter Nelson (4)
- 17 Judith Washburn
- 18 Marcie Nevin
- 19 Maureen Byrne, Zachary Turner (17)
- 20 Meghan Doane (13), Judy Lamont
- 21 Raylene Shaw (4)
- 22 Charlene Cassavant (a milestone!)
- 23 Beverly Heidel, Bryson Rose (13)
- 24 Cassidy Goodwin (11), Shelsie Watford
- 25 Alyvia Marie Dowling (5), Soleil Laurin (14), Diana Macfarlane, Hanila Novak
- 26 Rebecca Hughes (17), David Nevin, Christiana Perry (11)
- 27 Teddy Carter (a milestone!), Peyton Doyle (14)
- 28 Diana Dalton, Simira Hanger (12), Nancy Zuber
- 29 Bert Boos, Kristin Currie (a milestone!), Cameron Langsdale (13), Kaydence Shaw (9)

## Happy Anniversary:

- 3 Michele and Marshall Kysor (2001)
- 7 Pat and John Moynahan (1956-60 years!)

# From Joseph

Collect for the Feast of The Holy Name (January 1):

*Eternal Father, you gave to your incarnate Son the holy name of Jesus to be the sign of our salvation: Plant in every heart, we pray, the love of him who is the Savior of the world, our Lord Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, in glory everlasting. Amen.*

Plant in every heart the love of our Lord Jesus Christ – this bold prayer begins the calendar year. It reminds me of the parables in the Gospels about scattering the seed; but in this case, seed is not scattered but it is more so planted. It calls to mind a picture of a divine hand taking this seed of love for Christ, gently scooping a hole in fertile ground, and sweeping the dirt back over the hole and gently patting it down. Not just scattering seed this time.

*Could this be a year of evangelism?* People need and want words of hope, justice, love, growth, forgiveness. We are all fertile ground, waiting for these words not just to be scattered onto us but rather to be planted firmly in us, that the roots may grow deep inside us. How can St. Stephen's be part of Christ's great planting of Love in the world? How do you already spread the Good News of Christ's love, and what more can you do?

*Could this be a year of welcome?* Normally 'evangelism' and 'welcome' are put together, but aren't they a little separate? Evangel – the good news – is meant to be carried out, shared, spread. Welcome, on the other hand, is to invite and to set a place for someone in the pew, walking with them, inviting them to share the journey with us. Note that I didn't say "a place for someone new." We all need to feel welcomed by our sisters and brothers, whether we've been here for a long time or for the first time.

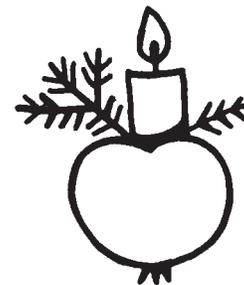
*Could this be a year of formation and growth?* People need to grow as people – grow as children of God, and grow together as the Beloved Community, as Martin Luther King would call it. What tools would help us as individuals and as a community of St. Stephen's grow best? What education and formational opportunities do we need? What do

you need for your own growth?

Epiphany is a season of revelation, of Christ being revealed to the world. Keeping with this planting metaphor, how do we share the beauty of our garden with the world, a garden where we blossom and bear fruit for Christ? Lent is right on Epiphany's heels, and it is a season of nurturing good growth in ourselves and in our communities. What will we need to prune, and what will we need to fertilize, that we may be an even more beautiful garden for Christ and for the world?

From St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, Chapter 3, verses 6-11:

"I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose, and each will receive wages according to the labor of each. For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building. According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. Each builder must choose with care how to build on it. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ."



# We Hope the Wonders of Advent and Christmas Filled You with Joy!

by Mamie Collins

What is Advent? It is a time of "Waiting in Faith with the Hope of all Christians that the Infant Jesus, the Messiah, will bring us to a Joy brought about by Peace and Justice for all His children.

What better time has this applied to our country? Advent was an important time to prepare. We believe that 2000 years after his birth, Jesus remains with us as Emmanuel, "God-with-Us."

Advent prepared us to celebrate the past Birth of Jesus and the present truth that we have the continued and ever present Jesus Christ in our lives. We used the season of Advent to pay attention to the Lord's coming as a child who would grow to be the Savior that died on the Cross for our Salvation.

Advent was a wake-up call, as it is so easy to get distracted at this time of year in the day to day living – or should we say surviving?

Our worship at Christmas encompassed the Joy of the Messiah's coming, but at the present time we must also live in that moment. Our country is in the midst of crisis. We have suddenly found ourselves in a culture of distrust of one another, instead of the love for one another as Jesus has instructed us. We are being bombarded by racial prejudice and inequality. We are being told to act out against undocumented immigrants, people of other religions (even the Muslims) who have fought and died in our wars in the Middle East and refuge women and children.

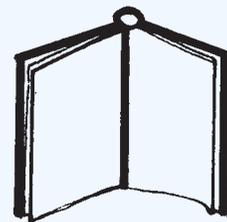
Wasn't Jesus a refugee? There was no room for him in the Inns, but one kind soul led Him to the stable and Salvation History came to be.

We must learn to live in the moment, because Jesus comes in surprising ways – do we smile at a stranger or lend a helping hand? Jesus comes to show the Way in ordinary circumstances and on ordinary days. "I was a stranger and you welcomed me." We must, therefore, be ready to pray for the peace He brought us 2000 years ago.

Throughout this year that is now known as the Year of Mercy for All, let our focus be to use the unique gifts He has given us to work for the Peace He brought us – in our hearts, homes, communities and country.

## The Eclectic Book Club

At the December Meeting, new members joined the group and, along with the regulars, were unanimous in their praise of the book, *All the Light We Cannot See*. We now take a break until Friday, February 5th, when Joan Kurber and Joan McFalls will co-host. The book to be read is *The Man Who United the States* by Simon Winchester, a Berkshire native. Please join this eclectic group of book lovers at 6:00 p.m. for wine and goodies, followed by a delicious potluck and discussion.



# St. Stephen's Parish

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