

News for Scattered Pew

February 2024



Val's Voice

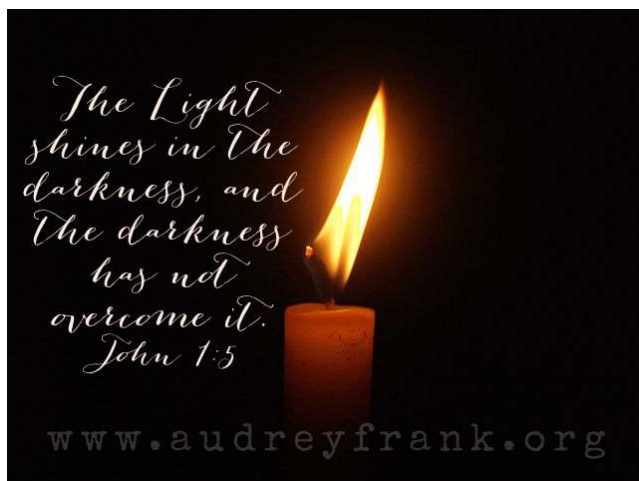
The days sure have been dreary lately! I don't know how many people said to me at church yesterday that they are struggling with the weather. Of course, some of us may appreciate that it is a

bit warmer, but still the greyness is a challenge for many.

The greyness just doesn't seem right for this Season after Epiphany: **a season of light shining in darkness, a time of stars leading wisdom seekers** across the world. Epiphany is a time when, depending on the year we hear of people deciding to learn from Jesus; we hear of Jesus offering healing; and we even hear of him turning water into wine, to continue a celebration! The days outside maybe full of **challenges and actual dreariness**, as we live through the darkest weeks of the year. But the readings offer us **hope and light**.

But Lent is a different story. Or it seems like it sometimes, as we consider the struggles of so many in our world, and of Jesus himself in his own last days and weeks.

So for several weeks I have been casting about – seeking wisdom that will acknowledge the struggles in our world, catch the themes of the Season of Lent, and still offer us the strength and resilience we need so much these days.



Finally, I have settled on a format of **prayer and reflection for Lent**, one designed to ground us in faith and move us to life and resilience even in hard days.

And so, on Sundays after church (and coffee) those interested will gather, likely in the boardroom. We will **settle ourselves** by reading again the offertory prayer for the day, in which we give our whole lives to God, and join in a moment of **quiet reflection**. We will pause to **go around the circle** – speaking of some of the **concerns or joys we are holding**. Then we will read some words from Bishop Steven Charleston, a retired Indigenous Episcopal Bishop from the U.S. His words are always beautiful, **grounding us in the realities of our lives**, and yet **holding out to us the love and hope of the Creator**.



Bishop Steven Charleston is a retired American Episcopal bishop and academic.

We will talk again – a bit about what struck us in his words and how they affect us. We will read the appointed psalm for that Sunday – again noting which part of these ancient prayers resonate with our lives, and offer words for us to hang on to.

Then we will wrap things up with a **brief silent time of reflection**, closing with the prayer after communion appointed for that day. This is always a prayer designed to help us **incorporate the gifts of God given** for that day into our lives **as we return to the rest of life...**

I'm looking forward to gathering with some of you at these times of Lenten reflection on Sundays after worship.

Val

Vestry Notes from January 23

Thanks to our parishioners for your generous giving towards the end of 2023! Total income for the year was \$183,908.76, while expenses totalled \$190,553.36. That means we were able to reduce our 2023 projected deficit to -\$6,644.50.

Giving for those in need was also generous.

Members of the parish donated the equivalent of \$998 in grocery cards to assist those in need in our parish, and \$600 for grocery cards for people who use the West End Drop In. In addition, \$600 was set aside to cover our portion of the West End Drop In's 2024 rent (to be forwarded in July) and \$1,100 (one-third of the Christmas Offering) was sent to "Fearless r2w" to support those transitioning out of Child & Family Services. **Thanks to all who gave to assist others!**

At our latest **parish potluck event** "Where are you from?" on January 21, three more people shared stories about where they came from in the church. Food was delicious, and so many again appreciated the diversity of the stories and how they help us build community together. More stories need to be told!

There is a **PWRDF mapping event** in the works for our parish to help us understand more of the history of this land: hopefully for March. More information soon!

At the moment the **photo directory** is on pause while we wait for a new office administrator to be hired. We look forward to you being able to get to know each other better once it is out!

Some of the **young adults of our parish** met January 14 to discuss what they might be interested in doing or thinking about together. They decided they will next meet on Sunday, March 10 after church, for lunch. They will look at areas that participants have expressed interest in. (Know someone who might be interested? Let them know!)

There will be a **Lenten program of learning and reflection**, following church on Sundays. Bring your lunch and join in. The program begins February 18. We will look at ways to reframe our lives and struggles, and develop faith and resilience as we consider the reflections of Bishop Steven Charleston, words from the Psalms, and perhaps the occasional guest speaker.

The draft budget for 2024 was accepted for presentation to the AGM. Here is a brief breakdown (the whole document is included in the 2024 AGM Package):

Income: **\$166,400**

Expenses: **\$198,609**

Staff Expenses \$135,917

Administration \$5,326

Building \$39,915

Program \$5,950

Diocesan Pledge \$10,000

Expenses covered by fees \$1,500

Deficit: **-\$32,208**

Year after year, we beat these deficit budgets, but at some point they will catch us. Vestry will be working on this challenge through the year. **Please share ideas and hold us in prayer.**

The parish administrative assistant position has been advertised on *Indeed*; we are hoping to have someone permanent in place by the end of February. Thanks so much to Therasa for her help and experience filling in!

Ash Wednesday service is February 14, 7 pm. It will also be available via Zoom.

Vestry Orientation will be on Saturday, March 2, 10 am – noon at the church.

Confirmation is scheduled for Sunday, April 7, the Second Sunday of Easter. Bishop Geoff Woodcroft will join us for this celebration with young people of our parish!



The Annual General Meeting is this Sunday, February 11 right after the service. Lunch will be provided. Please plan to attend – the decisions made here are important to all of us!

A 'thought-provoking' article from the December 2023 issue of the Anglican Journal. Edited for length here.

Neurotheology explores religion as activity of the brain

Neurotheology seeks to explain religious beliefs and experiences through the scientific study of neural activity.

Dr. Andrew Newberg, professor and director of research at Thomas Jefferson University and Hospital, has written numerous books on the subject. His interest in the field began in medical school while he was using neuro-imaging to study the effects on the brain of conditions such as depression and Alzheimer's disease.

"I said, 'Wait a minute. If we're doing brain scans of people who are depressed or have Alzheimer's ... why can't we do brain scans of people who are meditating and praying?'"

Another scientist studying the effects of religion on the brain is Patrick McNamara, associate professor of neurology at the Boston University School of Medicine. In his research, McNamara has studied the role of the frontal lobes in religious experience, as well as the connection between Parkinson's disease and religiosity.

"Religion is central to human flourishing," McNamara says. "So understanding how [the] brain mediates religious cognition may be crucial to understanding human beings."

In his book *Why God Won't Go Away: Brain Science and the Biology of Belief*, Newberg identifies two fundamental mechanisms of the brain: trying to keep us alive, which he calls self-maintenance; and learning and adapting to the world, which he calls self-transcendence.

"These are the basic functions of the brain," Newberg told the *Anglican Journal*. "But they are also matching up very well with the basic functions of religion - that

religion is there to help us to survive, to help us to understand our world." Religion serves the role of self-transcendence, he says, by helping people connect to a higher power, to understand right and wrong, and to learn how to behave and interact with others. Rituals marking important events, from childbirth to marriage to death, also "help us to transcend ourselves from one point of life to the next."

In addition, Newberg says, many religious rituals and practices such as meditation and prayer help people support themselves. Such practices "help us to cope, to find ways of managing our emotions, managing our behaviours," he says. "In so many ways, religion is a terrific form of self-maintenance."

Neural activity associated with religion is not limited to any single part of the brain or "God spot," Newberg says. Rather, religious experiences engage many different parts of the brain, depending on the religion and the method of worship or prayer.

Newberg's latest book *The Varieties of Spiritual Experience* details results from a survey of about 2,000 people who provided information about their spiritual experiences. While each person's experience is personal and unique, Newberg says, he also discovered commonalities that match well to basic brain functions. He identifies five core elements to these religious experiences:

- Sense of unity or connectedness
- Unique intensity
- Sense of clarity
- Feeling of surrender, of release or letting go
- Transformative feeling

You can read the whole article at:

<https://anglicanjournal.com/neurotheology-explores-religion-as-activity-of-the-brain/>

The Parish of St. Mary Magdalene is on Treaty 1 territory.

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St. Mary Magdalene Church Calendar

February 2024	March 2024
4 Sun Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany Eucharist 10:30 am	3 Sun Third Sunday in Lent Eucharist 10:30 am Lenten Reflection 12 - 1 pm
11 Sun Last Sunday of Epiphany Eucharist 10:30 am Annual General Meeting 12 pm	10 Sun Fourth Sunday in Lent Eucharist 10:30 am Lenten Reflection 12 - 1 pm
13 Tue Shrove Tuesday Pancakes 5:30 pm Vista Park Lodge 2:15 pm Dakota House 3:30 pm	12 Tue Vista Park Lodge 2:15 pm Dakota House 3:30 pm
14 Wed Ash Wednesday Service 7 pm	17 Sun Fifth Sunday in Lent Eucharist 10:30 am Lenten Reflection 12 - 1 pm
15 Thur River Park Gardens 10:30 am	21 Thur River Park Gardens 10:30 am
18 Sun First Sunday in Lent Eucharist 10:30 am Lenten Reflection 12 - 1 pm	24 Sun Palm Sunday Eucharist 10:30 am
25 Sun Second Sunday in Lent Eucharist 10:30 am Lenten Reflection 12 - 1 pm ACF Service 7 pm	26 Tue Vestry Meeting 7 pm
27 Tue Vestry Meeting 7 pm	28 Thur Maundy Thursday
	29 Fri Good Friday
	31 Sun Easter Sunday

ACF = Asian Christian Fellowship service in Urdu

Weekly Activities

Bible Study	Wednesdays 1 pm	Contact: Val
Christian Meditation	Thursdays 7:30 pm	Contact: Barbara B
Choir Practice	Sundays 9 am	Contact: Nancy