



ST. CHRISTOPHER'S NEWSLETTER

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Playing with the Creche

The Rev. Cara Spaccarelli



When I was a child, my home had the “nice” living room – the one the kids were not allowed to eat or drink in for fear of a mishap on the rug. I only hung out in there during the holidays, because I liked the creche that was displayed there. I don’t know if it was an expensive creche, but it was not plastic like my other toys and definitely breakable. There were all the characters – Mary, Joseph, shepherds, sheep, cow, wise men, and my favorite – two camels with accompanying packs that you could take on and off. I played with it for hours.

No, I didn't break it.

It will sit out this year in my parent’s “nice” living room that I am now allowed to eat and drink in. I don’t still play with it. Because I have my own creches! Yes, multiple creches. My early experience fostered a fondness for getting up close to the story. To put my hands on it. To imagine what these people thought and felt. What did they do next? How did they look back at this moment in their life?

Playing with the creche fostered an imagination for living with the Incarnation.

The Incarnation means that God is found in the human experience. God continues to come in vulnerable form inviting us to care. We bear witness with a mi of thoughts and feelings.

Advent is the time when we are invited to pay attention to God coming near.

Perhaps drawing closer to the story – playing with the creche in hand or heart – could help you see

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NEWSLETTER SUBMISSIONS

The next quarterly newsletter will come out mid-February (just before Lent begins). Submissions are due February 1 to Julie at office@stchrisccarmel.org.

Advent Space

Crafty Coffee Hour

Each Sunday of Advent following the 10 am service there will be coffee and a craft in the Parish Hall. The first Sunday - Dec. 3rd - it will be a larger reception for the Bishop's Visit. December 10 and 17 will have craft that can be adjusted for a range of skills along with some instructions to guide yourself.

- December 3: Various Holiday Crafts
- December 10: Homemade Holiday Cards
- December 17: Tissue Paper Craft

You are also invited just to come and chat.



In this busy season, it is our hope to provide space for you to be present to one another and yourself. Some people find that easier with a craft and some with a mug of coffee.

For those with young children, a craft option will work for them too. Our hope is to support your family in observing this season together in your church community.

Upcoming Events

DECEMBER

3

8 am - Noon

Bishop's Visit

Bishop Jennifer will preach and celebrate, confirm/receive new Episcopalians, and meet with the Vestry leadership. It is also the first Sunday of Advent, so our festive reception after the 10 am service will include some of the crafts that are typically at our Advent Event.

JANUARY

7

10 am - Noon

Epiphany Celebration

Epiphany marks the end of the Christmas season and we will celebrate with a **pageant by the youth** at the 10 am service. Last year's youth Christmas pageant was a highlight of the season! A twist on the **King Cake** tradition will follow during a time of fellowship after the service.

FEBRUARY

3

6:30 pm

Trivia Night

If you are not escaping to Florida for the winter, join us for a **fun evening of team trivia**. Sign-up as a team of 4-6 people or be assigned one and get to know some new people. Even if you are bad at trivia, you'll have a great time.

4

11 am

Annual Meeting

The **Annual Meeting** is the time we gather as a congregation to cover the business life of the church. We'll be discussing the highlights of our previous year, electing new leadership, and sharing hopes for the coming year.

Sunday

WORSHIP SERVICES

8:00 am A quiet service with traditional language

10:00 am Main service with choir, communion, and children's chapel. Service is live streamed.

11:00 am Formation classes
Monthly coffee hour



Advent Prayer

Advent is a season that we wait with hope. If there is something you are waiting for with hope, or another prayer request, you are invited to share them with Rev. Cara so that she can pray for you during her Advent retreat the week of December 11. Simply drop a note at the church or email cspaccarelli@stchriscarmel.org before then.

For More Information

Visit our website.

www.stchriscarmel.org

Service to the Community



St. Christopher's North End Neighbors ministry has initiated the first steps in supporting the 40 residents living in the new North End Apartments who have I/DD (Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities). We are working in partnership with the Village of Merici as well as management at North End.

North End Neighbors

The social team hosted a "Eat, Meet and Greet" gathering that took place Nov. 8 as a first-time connection between some of St. Christopher's folks and the residents. We also have a group of volunteers providing support as scheduled drivers to transport residents who need transportation to their jobs and other needs. This outreach began in early October with 7 volunteers providing 8 rides weekly with an additional volunteer schedule to begin after the new year. The schedule is managed by Hannah Harless, who is the North End and Village of Merici Community Support Coordinator. Following the successful meet and greet event, the social support group will provide a variety of options to help meet needs of the residents.

Interested in getting involved in this ministry? Reach out to Rob Wiley rob.wiley@gmail.com who is coordinating the transportation volunteers and Julie O'Connor julmac732@gmail.com who is coordinating the social event volunteers.

"Do your little bit of good where you are; it's those little bits of good put together that overwhelm the world."

Desmond Tutu

Totes for MRNC

Help us spread hope this holiday season as we fill 100 plastic totes for people served by the Mary Rigg Neighborhood Center. Mary Rigg once said, "It is our considered concern for the least one that underlies all of our activities."

If you picked up a tote earlier in November, please return it by Sunday, December 3rd.

The MRNC is so appreciative of our longstanding support for this project each holiday season.



Angel Tree Gift Cards

Starting Sunday, December 3, you are invited to take an envelope from the Angel Tree in the lobby and purchase one or more gift card(s) from the list of merchants provided. Return the envelope with your gift card(s) enclosed in the red "mailbox" under the tree. Gift cards will be distributed to Good Samaritan, Third Phase, and Prevail, and Shepherd Community Center. All gift cards must be returned to the church by December 17.



Faith Formation



Celebrating Advent and Lent as a Family

The seasons of Advent and Lent help us to slow down, take a breath, and re-focus on our relationship with God. We emphasize very different themes each season - Advent has us wait with anticipation for God to come to us in a new way, while Lent asks us to examine and readjust our practices to better show love for God and neighbor. Each season can be marked as different for your family in a way that slows you down together. Add a question of the day to your nightly dinner.

Read a story by the tree or family altar each night. Light the candles of an Advent wreath and say a prayer. Choose the same prayer for the whole season so the whole family learns it. Or find an activity each week to serve or volunteer together, helping make God's loving care known to people who otherwise might not feel it. By slowing down together, you create space to be aware of God's presence with you and the ways God is in your home already.

Holiday Events for Families with Children

DECEMBER

24

Christmas Eve Services

11 am: A 30-minute interactive service of Song and Story. Best for families with small, active children.

4 pm: Semi-interactive with Pageant From The Pews and festive carols, and Holy Communion. Best for children used to being in church for an hour.

8 pm: Traditional service with sermon, festive instruments and carols, and Holy Communion

JANUARY

7

Epiphany Celebration

Epiphany marks the end of the Christmas season and we will celebrate with a pageant performed by the youth; the PK-2nd graders will stay in the service. Afterwards there will be a time for fellowship and a sweet treat and we celebrate with a twist on the King Cake tradition.

FEBRUARY

13

Shrove Tuesday and Ash Wednesday

The **parish pancake supper** returns on the eve of Lent. Burning of the palms starts the evening, and a child-friendly short service with imposition of Ashes follows. The early Ash Wednesday service is geared to families with elementary school age children and younger.

Children's Formation

Children's Chapel for PK-2nd graders during the 10am service explores Bible stories through prayer, crafts, and video. Children's Chapel is not offered Dec. 24, 31 or January 7.

The 3rd-5th Graders meets at least once a month at 11am to explore peace through an engaging, multi-disciplinary curriculum. Upcoming dates: December 11, January 14, weekly February 11-Mar 24 in Lent, and April 14.

Youth Formation

At 11 am most Sundays youth meet for formation. In December they will be preparing for Christmas with a study of How the Grinch Stole Christmas!, and in January they will study the book of Revelation. They are also preparing the Epiphany pageant.

Lent All Ages Formation

The Season of Lent is traditionally a season of self-examination and reflection on practices for better loving God and neighbor. One of our basic Christian commitments is to honor the image of God in one another, a commitment challenged by a lie many people have believed, a lie that says some people are more important than others. This lie plays out in all kinds of ways in our society - that people who have better grades are more important, or people who earn more money are more important, or people who have a certain gender or ability or skin color are more important than other people also made in God's image.

So this Lent, we're going to look at this lie through the lens of racism. White people are not the problem, but racism is a problem created by white people, who often used religion to foster the lie that said they could dominate and exclude other people based on their skin color. The Church participated in this lie, but also has gifts given by God to speak the truth we know from God: that no matter what, every single person is dearly loved by God. Thus the Church also has something to say that is more than what we've hear in classrooms or workplaces, something that no one else is going to tell you.



We hope you will join us for the 6 sessions of **"Tell Me The Truth About The Lie That Caused Racism"** on the Sundays of Lent (February 18-March 24). After the 10 am service, a short visual story will be told to everyone, and then the different age groups will break into discussion groups for reflection, wondering and curiosity. In January, a parent letter will be sent with more information about the content and structure, and how the curriculum is designed for appropriate child development for learning and spirituality.

“Learning is not attained by chance, it must be sought for with ardour and diligence.”

Abigail Adams



Men's Bible Study

Beginning Thursday, November 30, join the Men's Bible Study for a 6-week discussion series reading Marcus Borg's [Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time](#). The group meets on zoom at 7 am Thursday mornings. Contact Kirk King at kirk13225@gmail.com for the link.



Balancing the Three-Legged Stool About Gender and Sexuality

Episcopalians engage theology by balancing Scripture, tradition, and reason (the 3-legged stool). In the past 50 years, Episcopal theology and doctrine shifted significantly on human sexuality and our commitment to honor the expression of God in different gender identities. Eventually our church canons on ordination and marriage changed. On Saturday, January 27, from 2:00 to 4:00 p.m., Rev. Chana will use this Episcopal lens to explain those shifts, primarily through lecture with some opportunity for discussion at the end.



Armchair Theologians Starts Fresh with New Format in January

Thanks to those who made it through the first iteration of this class! We will start fresh in January with a more accessible book and format for discussion.

Please connect with Rev. Chana for more information about the course content and goals at ctetzlaff@stchrisccarmel.org

O Come, all ye faithful

One subtle change

For many organists, one of the most thrilling moments of the year is playing “O come, all ye faithful” on Christmas Eve. It is usually the largest congregation of the year boisterously singing one the most beloved carols.



It is a common for organists to alter the harmonies of carols and hymns at certain points to enhance and enliven singing. During the fourth verse of ‘O come all ye faithful’ it has become so common to change one harmony in particular that New York Times journalist Hugh Morris (Dec. 21, 2022) has dubbed it “The Chord”.

The last verse begins - “Yea, Lord, we greet thee, born this happy morning; Jesus, to thee be glory given...” The organ then swells leading into an unexpected harmonic change exactly as we sing - “Word of the Father...”

You need not fully understand music theory or even sing to appreciate this moment. The unexpected harmonic shift along with the enthusiasm of a large congregation singing creates an absolutely magical moment.

In reflecting on this moment, “The Chord” as the journalist has dubbed it, is not all that exotic or unusual from a music theory perspective. It is unexpected in a subtle way, yet not overly extravagant. It is perfectly timed with the text and spirit of the moment.

It reminds me that as we celebrate the holiday season, it is not the outrageous gifts, the fanciest opulent meals, nor the perfect photo that most enhance our celebrations. It is usually one subtle thing, timed at just the right moment, that can give the most meaning to our celebrations.

- Robert Richter, Music Director

New Mission Statement

St. Christopher's is a reverently prayerful and playful community inviting all to embrace God's expansive love.

In October the Vestry announced our new mission statement. While it may not ever roll off the tongue of every member, hopefully the tagline that comes from it – Embracing God’s Expansive Love – will be a recognizable description of our life together.

Looking at the last few month's of life together, here are some examples:

- over 70 adults in a weekly formation group – hearts & minds expanding
- the beginning of our ministry as North End Neighbors – reaching out in love while expanding our own selves
- 35 spent a day learning about concepts of gender so they can be more welcoming to those who often experience rejection in the church
- 8 adults saying yes to serving on Children’s Chapel adult team to help our youngest members experience God’s story of love and community
- so many more ways large and small, visible and invisible, within the congregation and outside it

Embracing God’s expansive love is both an inward and outward movement. You are embraced by God’s love and it expands you personally, and you are part of the expansion of God’s love to others when you embrace it and turn towards others. Sometimes one comes first; sometimes the other; mostly both movements are intertwined.

St. Christopher's did not need a new mission statement to do this work, but perhaps it can help us see it more clearly unfold among us.

Thank You

St. Christopher's is full of generous people who give of their time and talent to help this community's ministry thrive. Below is just a sampling of members' behind the scenes work to appreciate.

- Carolyn Bickel organizing the October cookout
- Jeremy Bell tending to St. Chris Crops all summer
- Cooper Grabow rebuilding the Blessing Box and painting columarium benches for Eagle Scout project
- Jen Wiley leading the adult children's chapel team
- Colleen Largent and Amanda Livarchik hosting October young families' gathering
- Kevin Price and Rob Weissert (and company) putting together our first pumpkin patch
- Steve Barnum and Darry Weaver working to update our fire protection system
- Carolyn Parrott pulling together the visual display of the building history project for the May celebration

Photo Gallery



If These Walls Could Talk

As the church has been looking at our branding and communications, one of the questions we have pondered is what story are we telling and how are we telling it. One way to tell our story is on the walls of our building, and we have a lot of open wall space! In the past month and the coming month, the following has appeared or will appear:

- Many photos of congregational life in the Parish Hallway
- Framed version of the building history created for the May event in the hallway outside the choir room.
- Painting - Crossing the Red Sea - in the Connection Center
- 3 St. John's Bible illustrated prints in Conference Room

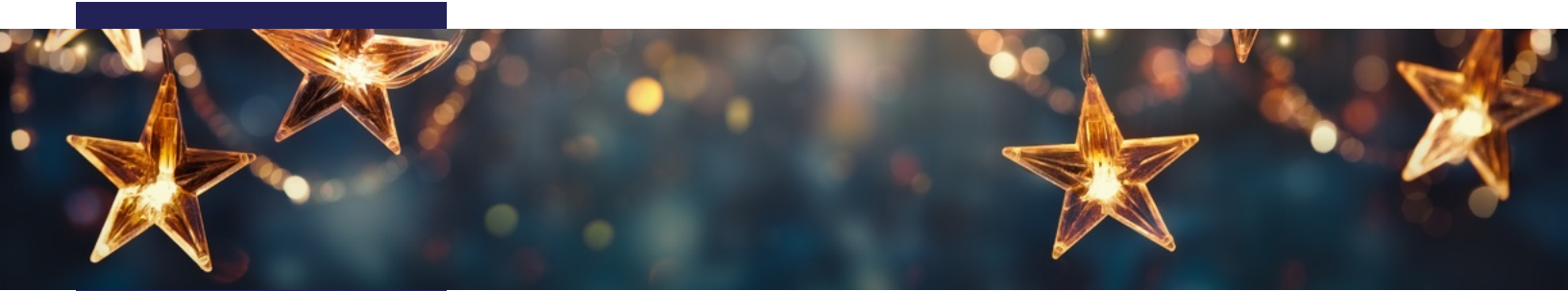
The canvas photos, the St. John's Bible prints, and the Crossing of the Red Sea were paid for by a small portion of the bequest from Dorinda Dick who always told the story of our parish and our faith so beautifully.

St. Christopher's Episcopal Church

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Christmas Services

CHRISTMAS EVE

11:00 am

Song and Story Service
for Young Families

8:00 pm

Traditional Service with Communion,
Choir, and Brass

4:00 pm

Service with Pageant, Carols,
and Communion

CHRISTMAS DAY

9:00 am

Contemplative Service with Communion