

Enjoy the St. James March Journal



## St. James Community Journal

March 2014

Dear St. James Members and Friends,

Please enjoy reading our March edition of the St. James Community Journal. For our upcoming events please view the News and Events page or the Calendar on our website at [www.stjamessf.org](http://www.stjamessf.org).

If you have comments about this month's Journal or items that you'd like to contribute for the next journal please contact Rose Scarff. For more information about St. James please contact Erazm Pochron in the church office at [stjames@stjamessf.org](mailto:stjames@stjamessf.org) or (415) 751-1198 x2.

Thank you!  
Rose and Erazm

### Some Notes on Sustaining Spiritual Practices

**By Rev. John Kirkley**



*"You've all been to the stadium and seen the athletes race. Everyone runs; one wins. Run to win. All good athletes train hard. They do it for a gold medal that tarnishes and fades. You're after one that's gold eternally.*

*"I don't know about you, but I'm running hard for the finish line. I'm giving it everything I've got. No sloppy living for me! I'm staying alert and in top condition. I'm not going to get caught napping, telling everyone else about it and then missing out myself."*

- 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, The Message

During this season of Lent, you are invited to take the 20+1+4 Challenge: twenty minutes of prayer daily, one hour of worship weekly, and four hours of service to people in need monthly. These three practices – prayer, worship, service – help us to slow down and nurture our conscious connection to God, and to our brothers and sisters. They invite us to move beyond ourselves: our self-preoccupations and our worries. Engaging in them is a disciplined way to foster mindfulness, gratitude, and compassion. By doing them, we can become better equipped to follow Jesus.

You may already be engaged in these practices. You may be called to take on this challenge anonymously, as an act of humility – praying to your Mother/Father in secret and not letting your right hand know what your left hand

is doing, as Jesus counsels us to do. But there is no shame in needing some support and accountability, especially with practices that may be new to you. Jesus sent his disciples out two-by-two, recognizing the need to lean on each other every now and then.

So, whether or not you take this particular challenge, I'd like to offer a few suggestions about sustaining spiritual practices.

1. **Give yourself credit for what you are already doing.** Too often, we fail to acknowledge the prayer, worship, and service that already are part of our lives. This challenge isn't about doing more per se; it is about bringing awareness to what we do and do not do.

2. **Drop your judgments.** This is not a contest (St. Paul's athletic metaphor notwithstanding). It isn't about being good or bad, better or worse. No one will be graded. It is an invitation to living with greater intentionality and a deeper sense of connection to God and our neighbor.

3. **Pray as you can, not as you can't.** One size does not fit all. The good news is that there are a rich variety of ways to pray in Christian tradition: with and without words, alone and with others, in silence and with music, sitting, kneeling or walking. And, of course, there are endless opportunities to be of service to others. The challenge is to find what fits you, and to trust yourself.

4. **Acknowledge your desire and your fear.** Most people both desire and fear intimacy with God and with other people; especially when such intimacy brings us in touch with loss and suffering. Yet, it is this very same connection that provides whatever healing we may need. Take a deep breath. Let it go. Trust that your desire is greater than your fear.

5. **Ask for help.** Find a prayer partner. Participate in opportunities to reflect on your prayer and service in a small group. There are many resources – countless books, websites, and people – right here at St. James – to support you on your journey. You don't have to do this alone. In fact, I doubt you can do it alone.

6. **Lighten up.** If you didn't pray in the morning, pray in the afternoon. If you can't get in twenty minutes, then do ten (or 20 minutes, one minute at a time throughout the day). If you can't attend the Sunday service, pop into Morning Prayer on Tuesday. If you forget to pray one day, pray the next. It is OK.

7. **Let go of expectations.** Meditation can be really boring, distracting, or frustrating. The people we serve may not be particularly grateful or even nice. Worship may be renewing or aggravating or both or neither. Let it be what it is, rather than trying to make it be something else. Just notice and let it go. It will not stay the same for very long, anyway. Sometimes, the most important thing we can do is just stay open and pay attention. We can't control the experience.

8. **Be curious.** Br. Lawrence of the Resurrection said, "Sometimes, we will be surprised to discover what our soul is saying to God." We may indeed be surprised by what emerges in our meditation, or by our experience of regular worship over a period of time, or by what we receive when we thought we were serving others. The surprises aren't always positive, but they always have something to teach us.

These practices are ways to stay alert to the invitations to love that abound in our lives. They train us to see and respond to the invitations. That is the gold medal that lasts for eternity: living in love.

## The Holy Vote

by Elizabeth Nelson



At January's Annual Parish Meeting, and in the February Journal, there's been discussion of a proposed amendment to St. James's by-laws. We're being asked to consider choosing new Vestry members and Deanery delegates by "casting lots" (a blind drawing of nominees' names), rather than by community vote. If you haven't heard much about this proposal so far, I encourage you to take a look in the February Journal and the parish Annual Report.

The goal of this proposed amendment is to encourage wide-ranging, lively community discussion about service and leadership at St. James, and to involve more of our members in new roles. What a vital, empowering goal! I'm beyond grateful to our current Vestry for seeking ways to encourage that discussion, and to invite new St. James leaders to step forward in creative service.

But I strongly believe that that kind of discussion and invitation needs to lead to community consensus rather than a random drawing. Both as a political animal and as a person of faith, I need to be part of a community that talks, prays, and then votes.

### *A Question of Politics*

We live in a representative democracy – imperfect, but striving for the ideal of "one citizen, one vote." The Episcopal Church USA, with roots in a polity much different and much older than the Constitution, still aims for inclusive, democratic decision-making. And with all that, there are exactly three things that our parish community is canonically "allowed" to decide by vote: amendments to our parish by-laws; representatives to our parish's governing body, the Vestry; and representatives to our Deanery and Diocesan convention.

Surrendering two votes out of three doesn't feel to me like a move toward greater community empowerment or equality of representation.

A primary argument made against selection by vote is the "contest" aspect of elections, the concern that candidates who aren't elected may feel hurt or discouraged. Anyone who ever ran for Student Body in high school knows that it's perfectly possible for elections to be treated as contests – and most of us have a shy high-schooler lurking inside us who doesn't want to risk rejection. But if a community and its members understand the danger of "election-as-contest," can't we find ways to avoid it? Can't we show our gratitude to every candidate, and find avenues of service for each one's gifts – whether on the Vestry or off? Can we honor the willingness of each nominee to take a risk, so that all the members of the community get a chance to participate in choosing the people who make choices on our behalf?

### *A Question of Faith*

For me, this goes beyond belief in democracy; it raises the question of how I believe God's will gets made clear to God's people.

Advocates of Vestry selection "by lots" like to quote the story told early in the book of Acts, where the eleven remaining Apostles (after Judas's defection) prayed and then drew lots to select a new Number Twelve. With respect and gratitude to the Apostles, this isn't a story that inspires me to imitate them. To me it seems like a

decision made within the framework of their particular time and culture. It seems that way for several reasons: no women on their short-list, for one thing, and for another thing, apparently, a fairly old-fashioned idea about how God participates in human decisions.

I don't believe that casting lots is a way to discern God's will. I believe God respects the freedom of creation enough to let random events be random, and doesn't micromanage them to make a point or teach a lesson. I believe God speaks and acts in our hearts and minds, and especially in our relationships with one another; I believe that our best shot at discerning God's will, as a community, is to pray together, talk together, and reach a consensus that takes account of everyone's voice – for example, by vote. No guarantees; even at our best, we're imperfect hearers and doers of God's Word. But I'm convinced that prayerful talk and choice is likelier to reveal that Word than the luck of the draw.

### *A Question of Community*

Ever since I came to St. James I've been challenged, delighted, humbled, and made wiser by this community's capacity to pray and talk together, listen to every voice, and reach consensus. My relationship with the community will change in fundamental ways if we deliberately relinquish a central part of our discernment process to random chance.

Yes please, let's talk more together about service and leadership. Yes please, let's find ways to encourage more community members to lead and serve. Yes please, let's continue to listen to God and to one another – in our prayers, in our conversations, and in our votes.

## **News from the Vestry**

**By Barbara Webb, Senior Warden**



There are lots of exciting things coming up at St. James. Get your calendars ready!

**March 23:** Pie Sunday. Bring your pies sweet and savory to share while we go over budget pie charts!

**March 30:** Guest Preacher, The Rev. Mary Moreno. She is the founder of the Guadalupe Art Program and will lead a forum following the 10 a.m. service to talk about her work on the issues of human trafficking and the juvenile justice system.

**April 12:** Church Workday

In May a book signing event is planned in conjunction with Green Apple Books, featuring Dr. Rebecca Gordon and her newly published book, *Mainstreaming Torture*.

An event for families with children, date to be decided, probably this spring

Two fundraising events, one this spring and one in the fall - Focus around food, music, dancing, movie night, art display, auction, wine tasting, any or all.

We need your talents! Please read and give serious thought to the "Someone" Doesn't Live Here" insert in your Sunday Bulletin. Or maybe disaster preparedness. If any of these ministries grab your interest, contact [Pastor John](#), the [Church Office](#), or myself.

## A Matter of Perception

by Carolyn Swearingen, Ph.D.  
California Counseling Institute



Perception is a tricky thing. So much of how we make sense of and process information from the world around us has to do with how we perceive and understand events, people and our interactions with them. Often, we organize and process information by developing a narrative about them, and this narrative can directly impact how we feel about and subsequently respond to a situation. For example, if a friend of mine isn't returning my phone calls, I can make sense of her lack of communication by telling myself: "Ann must be really busy and stressed out this week." This perception allows me to have feelings of patience and compassion for my friend and helps me to not be reactive towards her. On the other hand, I could tell myself: "Ann is being so thoughtless and rude—I bet she's not responding to me on purpose!" This perception results in the same situation eliciting feelings of anger and hurt and likely a more reactive response on my part.

So often my work with couples, as an Emotionally Focused Therapist (EFT), involves helping partners clarify and articulate their intentions and change their (mis)perceptions of their partner's behavior so they can be more loving toward each other. More often than not, one partner's perception ends up being not only mistaken, but radically different from what the partner was intending. By helping couples see and understand where their cycles of misperception and miscommunication come from, I am able to help each see the other in a new, different, and oftentimes more loving light.

One tool I help both individual clients as well as my couples to develop is noticing perceptions and narratives. Just the act of noticing your narrative can help you gain clarity around it and see how it affects you. You then may be more able to communicate and check out your assumption in order to see if it is actually true or not....and, potentially, save yourself a lot of pain and anger as a result.

## A Poem

by Christie Higgins



### **TO THE MEMBERS OF MY GROUP FOR SUICIDAL ACTIVE DUTY AND FOR SUICIDAL VETERANS:**

I kiss you and hug you forevermore.  
It is you that with compassion, I deeply adore.  
May your New Year answer your hopes, dreams, and prayers.  
May you be able to un-peel those horrific layers.  
When you dream: May GOD be with you.  
When you dream: May your flashbacks be few.  
When you are down, and you cry many a tear:  
Please Know that I don't want you, to them adhere.

With All of My Love, Support, Empathy, and Thanks-  
Thank you for filling out our country's ranks.

-With All of My Eternal Love, for Each and Everyone of You,  
Margaret

## **Gun Violence Prevention Sabbath Weekend**

***Gun Violence Prevention Sabbath Weekend is March 13-16***



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### **GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION**

Resolved, That all congregations in the Diocese of California are encouraged to study the causes of urban gun violence, and to pray for peace in our streets;

Resolved, That all congregations encourage their members to remove guns from their own homes, and, where that is impossible, to make sure that such guns are safely stored; and to further assure that the homes where their children play are either free from guns or that such guns are safely stored in compliance with California State law (Penal Code §§ 25100, 25200);

Resolved, That all congregations also encourage those who have guns to have ongoing gun safety training; and

Resolved, That the Bishop appoint a diocesan Task Force for Action Against Gun Violence with a representative from each deanery to study the causes and breadth of gun violence and to report to the 165th Diocesan Convention with final recommendations for deanery and diocesan action.

Adopted at the 164th Convention of the Diocese of California  
October 26, 2013

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March 13 – 16, 2014, places of worship across the nation are joining the Washington National Cathedral and Faiths United to Prevent Gun Violence, a coalition of 50 national denominations and faith-based organizations, to remember those who have lost their lives to gunfire, pray for those whose lives have been forever changed because of the loss of a loved one, and to continue the discussion on how communities of faith can work together to help reduce gun violence.

St. James will participate in this observance on Sunday, March 16, with a sermon and table discussion during coffee hour to educate ourselves about gun violence. We will remember those who have died, pray for forgiveness, healing, and reconciliation, and examine what we can do to make our communities safer. One of our vestry members, Mary Balmana, is a member of the diocesan Task Force for Action Against Gun Violence, and she will be available to talk about the work of the Task Force.

## MARCH CALENDAR

March 2, Sunday	Services at <b>8 a.m. &amp; 10 a.m.</b> Mindfulness Meditation after <b>10:00 a.m.</b> service
March 4, Tuesday	<b>6 p.m.</b> <i>Shrove Tuesday</i> Pancake Supper
March 5, Wednesday	<b>7 p.m.</b> Ash Wednesday service
March 6, Thursday	<b>6:30 p.m.</b> <i>Lectio Divina</i> group
March 8, Saturday	<b>7:30 a.m.</b> Men's Breakfast-Keeping Faith in a Competitive World
March 9, Sunday	Service at <b>8 a.m. &amp; 10 a.m.</b> Service <b>9 a.m.</b> Choir Practice St. James serves at Martin de Porres House of Hospitality <b>7 – 9 p.m.</b> The Way of Christ Study Group
March 16, Sunday	Services at <b>8 a.m. &amp; 10 a.m.</b> <b>12 noon</b> – Vestry Meeting
March 20, Thursday	<b>6:30 p.m.</b> <i>Lectio Divina</i> group
March 22, Saturday	<b>10 a.m.</b> Women's Group meeting at Creative Canopy
March 23, Sunday	Services at <b>8 a.m. &amp; 10 a.m.</b> <b>9 a.m.</b> Choir Practice <b>12 noon</b> – Pie Sunday
March 30, Sunday	Services at <b>8 a.m. &amp; 10 a.m.</b>
Every Tuesday	<b>7:30 a.m.</b> Morning Prayer & Meditation
Every Wednesday	<b>6:30 p.m.</b> Evening Prayer & Meditation <b>7 p.m.</b> Lenten Program (beginning March 12) <b>7:30 p.m.</b> Buddhist Meditation in Caldwell Room

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