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St. John's Episcopal Church

The Eagle

December 2022

Online vs. In-Person

I have invented a law. Johnston's First Law of Emails. It's a law that is relevant to all clergy. It goes like this: ***The number of emails a pastor receives about a topic is around 5% of the number of parishioners who are thinking about it.*** Johnston's Law goes on to advise how clergy should respond to such emails, using this formula:

- 1 email received: Just drop a quick reply to the person, reassuring them that everything is OK.
- 2 emails received: This topic was covered on MSNBC or Fox News.
- 3 emails received: The pastor should really think about making a statement, summarizing his/her views on the topic.
- 4 emails received: This is a debate of national importance, and the pastor must urgently issue a long and authoritative treatise before people storm the church with pitchforks.

As we've emerged from the pandemic, there is one topic that is off-the-charts for emails to clergy. Here it is: **Now that we are back in-person, should we drop streaming church services?** I love this question because, for a change, I think I know the answer. So I rush to answer it.

First, let's stake out the common ground. There's a piece of land that we can all agree on. **Nothing can take the place of Christian community.** The gold-standard is when we all come together (as much as we are able to) to worship and celebrate our connection in Christ with each other, as Christ's family who belong to St John's, Alabama. This is especially important as nowadays there are few places where people choose to hang out with folks who are not like them. Church is the opportunity to encounter diversity, and to learn, grow, and love.

So, if you are often out-of-town on weekends, try extra hard to re-engage with St John's in-person on those Sundays when you are able to attend.

- But (and didn't you just know there was a 'but' coming?) there's a lot more to be said than that..
1. **I believe there is still an absolute need to stream digital services.** These services have become vital - not just to folks who are sheltering from Covid, but to faithful church members who can't be in church for other very valid reasons. Streaming services empowers infirm and homebound parishioners to view a real worship service (albeit on TV) occurring in the building they love, seeing their friends walking up for communion, listening to the music, and hearing the preacher. At St John's we have a wonderful ministry of Lay Eucharistic Visitors to go to the homes of such folk, but this is no substitute for entering fully into the worship of their church. Can I really say to housebound parishioners, "I'm glad you enjoyed taking part in the services on your TV, but now we're going to stop that"? Doesn't this, actually, hint at the exclusion of elderly, homebound, or disabled people? **Once we've given them this gift, why would we take it away?**
 2. **We stream services not just to provide worship opportunities for regular churchgoers who couldn't make it to the building, but as an act of evangelism for those who will not come.** Through our streams we reach folk who do not go to church. Some of them, in time, might be persuaded to attend in person. But even if they don't, they are still hearing the Gospel, enjoying some Christian music, and experiencing something of God. **Can we really now pull the plug on these folks, knowing it is possibly the only explicitly Christian input in their lives?**

So, if you are often out-of-town on weekends, please make it a priority to stream St John's 10:30 service either live or 'on-demand'. Make every effort to remain connected with the people and with what God is saying to the parish.

The pandemic gave us a kick that we needed to exploit technology as a vital way of communicating and worshiping in the future. We understandably despair over the growing phenomenon of secularization. We complain about competing activities taking away our young families, and we lament the absence of people who are working, cycling, or at the lake on Sunday morning. **But the Church's task has always been to adapt our methods of communication so that people still hear our message, despite what else is going on in their lives.** We have people who watch recorded services on Wednesday afternoons because they were out of town on Sunday. We **must** continue digital - and increase it.

One of the great hallmarks of Anglican practice is the adage of 'both and', rather than excluding options and people. **'BOTH in-person AND streaming' gives us the maximum opportunity to reach folks - faithful people who can't be in church, as well as people who aren't yet Christians.** Yes, streaming cannot and never will replace in-person, but why do we have to choose one form and reject the other? We don't. We can't. We won't.

PS. In the New Year I will be forming a team of parishioners to dream about how we can use new technologies to expand the mission and ministry of St John's. If you have some expertise or interest in this topic, please let me know.

Advent & Christmas Services

- Dec. 18**
9:45 AM-Children's Christmas Pageant
- Dec. 22**
7PM- Christmas Organ Concert
- Dec. 24- Christmas Eve Services**
4:30- Carillon Concert
5pm – Children's Christmas Eucharist
7pm – Holy Eucharist Rite II
10pm – Holy Eucharist I, with chants & incense
- Dec. 25- Christmas Day Service**
10am - Holy Eucharist II
- January 1- New Year's Day Service**
10am – Holy Eucharist II



Christmas Flowers in the Church.

If you would like to contribute money towards decorating the church for Christmas, you may do so by writing a check to St. John's, or you may pay online. A link to the online payment form is in the weekly Eagle email. If you would like to add honorarium or memorial names, please list them in the memo section or fill out an order form at the church. All Memorial & Honorarium names will be included in the Christmas bulletins.

Mary and Martha Guild Christmas Party

Dec 13 @ 6:30pm — 3403 silver Lane

Its’s time for the annual Mary and Martha Guild Christmas Party! Fairlie Herron as graciously agreed to host and will provide the main meal. For additional items, a sign up genius link is posted in the weekly Eagle email. We will play Dirty Santa so please bring a wrapped gift valued at \$25 or less.



Young Adult Supper Club Christmas Party

Dec 20 @6:30 pm—782 Felder Avenue

Dustin and Georgia Holmes will host our Young Adult's Christmas party on December 20 from 6:30-8:30 pm. Everyone should bring a side dish, appetizer or dessert to share. Please wear your favorite "tacky sweater". We will play Dirty Santa, so please bring a wrapped gift under \$25. This will be an adults only gathering this month.

Club 56

Dec 18 5pm-7:30 pm

Club 56 will meet on Sunday, December 18th for cookie decorating, Dirty Santa and we will watch the "Grinch" movie on the big screen in the parish hall. Every child should bring a GAG gift (for the Dirty Santa game), and the price limit is \$20. this group is for 5th and 5th graders only.

There will also be pizza and popcorn, so come hungry and invite a friend! We will meet in the parish hall (of St. John's) from 5-7:30 pm.



Christmas Organ Concert

Dec 22 7pm

Joel Gregory will be performing a selection of Christmas music on Thursday December 22, at 7 pm. This will be a beautiful lead into the Christmas weekend.

WARDENS' REPORT

Below are the highlights: month of November 2022

- Our November 13, 2022, "Poppy Sunday" (known as "Remembrance Sunday" in England) was beautiful and healing. Expect to see an article about it in the December issue of *BOOM! Magazine*. It is our plan to make Poppy Sunday a St. John's tradition.
- We can see the light at the end of the tunnel for our windows project. The entire windows project is expected to be complete no later than February 2023, so we can remove all the scaffolding.
- Multiple groups have already requested and received tours of the Stained Glass Windows of St. John's.
- We have had multiple requests to clean and restore the two large Peter Paul Rubens reproduction paintings in the Nave. The Vestry has authorized a review of the cost and logistics of this potential project.
- In the wake of the tragedy at St. Stephens Episcopal Church on June 16, 2022, the Diocese of Alabama has made some security suggestions for Alabama Episcopal churches. We are working through those suggestions.
- Stewardship is coming along. A heartfelt thanks to all of our fellow parishioners who have pledged so generously for our needs in 2023. We have been moved by the commitment of first-time pledgers, and are so grateful for their investment in the mission of St John's. The Vestry has split up the names for those members who we think will make a pledge, but who have not yet done so.
- **William Haynes** has been compiling our long-term needs plan for upcoming repairs to our building and grounds. The issue with our heating system has been resolved.
- As we approach the end of the calendar year, we encourage those who have pledged for 2022 to send in the balance of their pledge obligation so we can have a financially strong 2022 year-end.

Every Blessing:
The Wardens (Will Hill Tankersley and William Haynes)

Christmas Pageant

Dec 18 9:45 am

Join us for the Christmas Pageant Sunday, December 18, at 9:45 AM. This is an intergenerational worship service. All are welcome and encouraged to come enjoy beautiful music provided by organist Joel Gregory and watch the children of the parish illustrate the Nativity story. Roles are available for all children who come, regardless of practice availability.

Practice will take place during the Sunday School hour on December 4th and 11th.

December In-Gathering

Our December focus will be on the Angel Tree. Each Advent, St. John's participates in an Angel tree outreach. We work directly with Christmas Clearinghouse, a local outreach that helps provide presents for children in low-income families. The angel tree is available in the parish house. Families may be adopted by one family or a group of families working together. Gifts will be due to the families by December 14th .



Adult Advent Offerings

We are Waiting Rector’s Forum Advent Course

Join Duncan for a lively exploration of the great Advent theme of “Waiting”.
December 4th: Why are we waiting?
December 11th: What are we waiting for?
December 18th: How shall we wait?
Session one and two will start at 9:15am and session three will begin at 9:00am. This is to accommodate the Christmas pageant at 9:45am.

Online Advent Book Study

Join Deonna online Tuesday nights from 7pm-8pm during Advent (11/29-12/20) for a book study on the 4th century ancient text On the Incarnation, by St. Athanasius. The hope is that this book will help you experience Christmas in a deeper and more meaningful way.

The class in on (4) TUESDAYS: Nov 29, Dec 6, Dec 13, and Dec 20 from 7pm to 8pm

The book is available in the book store and a link to the free text is in the weekly Eagle email. Just a fair warning, because we will be doing a close reading of this 4th century text, it will be a theologically intensive class and will require some heavy intellectual lifting at points. However, Deonna has complete confidence that you are all very much up to the task!

Advent Reflection Group

An Advent Reflection group will be meeting on Sundays at 6:00 pm at the home of Polly Williamson (1248 Westmoreland Ave). If you would like to participate or have any questions, please contact Carrie Shaw (gracyegray@gmail.com)

New Pledge Cards Coming Soon!

In the coming weeks new pledge cards will be arriving via mail. They look different because we are using a new company. Pledge cards will now be mailed quarterly instead of annually.

Online Statements

Pledge/donation statements will be available next week. Anyone who has an active email address in the database will receive an email with a link included. Click the link to access your statement. Those without an email address will have a paper statement mailed to you. If you would prefer a mailed statement, please call or email Heather Herring, 262-1937/heather@stjohnsmontgomery.org