

# The Guardian

FEBRUARY 2021

## FROM THE RECTORY

### REFLECTIONS ON A STRANGE YEAR: AN EXCERPT FROM THE ANNUAL REPORT

Church Annual Reports are usually pretty standard. We report on our committees, programs and events from the year. There are changes from year to year, but they are usually fairly subtle.

With the advent of Coronavirus Pandemic, there was nothing standard about this year. Not only did our church experience tremendous change, but every person, every organization, every business, every school, every government on the planet experienced tremendous change. The events of 2020, to use an overused word, were ‘unprecedented.’

When the pandemic started, I wondered if our church would survive. How could we be a church if we could not gather? Could not visit each other? Could not do the things that were part of who we are, like receiving Holy Communion? Or working at the Tag Sale? Or participating in the Christmas Pageant?

The good news is that after 10 months of not gathering in the church, after 10 months of having to change and adapt to being the church in a very different way, we are still here. We are still St. Michael’s Episcopal Church and we are still doing ministry and proclaiming God’s love for all in Jesus Christ. While what we do looks completely different from last year, we have adapted to our circumstances and found that for many of us, our faith has become even more essential than it was before the pandemic began.

Here are some things that stand out for me as I reflect upon this last year.

#### **Resilience and faithfulness**

Agility, experimentation, trying things on, embracing change in the church — these are all values we have been practicing at St. Michael’s these last many years. Little did we know just how important these practices would be to us in 2020! I have been amazed at our ability to change the way we do ministry and our ability to learn new ways of being the church. You all are to be commended by your resilience. In addition to being able to change, you have been exceedingly faithful to our ministry together.

#### **Generosity**

I have been astounded by the generosity of St. Michael’s parishioners this year. Every time requests came from St. Michael’s — for help, for things, for prayers, for money — you have responded with great generosity. “The Bench” outside St. Michael’s has become the place where we collect donations of many kinds. The request for Pod leaders and Communion Deliverers (St. Michael’s Elves) was met with enthusiasm and many volunteers. Invitations to donate food and other items for neighbors in need have surpassed all expectations.

#### **Sacred spaces**

Because we could not gather inside the church, we have been gathering virtually. This means that we have been invited into one another’s kitchens, dining rooms, porches, offices and gardens. We have met one another’s cats, dogs, rats and rabbits. Instead of coming to one central sacred space, we have experienced the presence of God in

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our homes and gardens. It has been intimate and personal and funny and often profound to be gathered this way as we pray, meet and work.

### **Fatigue, fatigue, fatigue**

All this change has taken its toll. The energy we receive from being in one another's physical presence has been lost, as well as the feeling of singing together with the organ reverberating through our bodies. We are tired of looking at screens, wearing masks, being separated, fasting from the sacraments, washing our hands and having to constantly adapt to new ways of doing things!

### **The goodness of the flesh**

One of the central messages of the incarnation is God's affirmation through Jesus of the goodness of the flesh. Not only have we not been able to hug, shake hands or pat one another on the back, we have not been able to receive Holy Communion, the BODY of Christ, as a gathered community. Our fast from all these physical things has helped us understand their great value.

It is hard to know what 2021 will bring, but I am very thankful for the unfailing support and faithfulness of our church family and know that with God's help we will be able to meet the challenges that lie before us.

*Mary*  
Mary Lindquist  
Rector

## NEWS OF THE PARISH

**LENTEN SERIES 2021**  
***VOICES FROM THE WILDERNESS:***  
***REFLECTIONS ON A YEAR OF DISRUPTION***  
**TUESDAYS, 6–7:15 PM**  
**FEBRUARY 23-MARCH 23**

March 15 marks the one-year anniversary of our church's time of separation as well as deep and previously unthinkable changes in our lives. During the Lenten series this year, we will take time to reflect on this time and all the changes it has wrought for ourselves, our church, our nation and our world.

The Wilderness is one of the ways we think about Lent. It is the place of Jesus' temptation and fasting; it is the place where the Jews wandered for 40 years before reaching the Promised Land; it is also the place where early Christian monks and nuns chose to live in order to be closer to God. The Wilderness is a place of hardship and danger, but also a place of growth and

renewal. In what ways have we been living that paradox in this time?

More information is coming about the speakers and the structure of the Lenten Series, but the times and dates are set for Tuesdays, 6–7:15 pm, February 23, March 2, March 9, March 16 and March 23. These will be Zoom Meetings, so we will be able to see one another and interact. At the end of the evening, we will have a time of prayer and worship. Zoom links will be provided on the website and in your eNews — stay tuned!

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**ASH WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 17**  
**12 PM & 5:30 PM**

How do we recognize Ash Wednesday in a Pandemic? We will have our services over Zoom but will not be able to apply the ashes to your foreheads with those

## NEWS OF THE PARISH

powerful words: *Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return.* At a children's Ash Wednesday service I attended once, the minister used different words as he applied the ashes, *Remember that you are part of God's earth.*

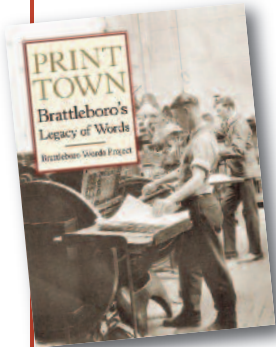
In this spirit I invite you to collect ashes from your fireplace or dirt from your yard to order to apply the ashes to yourself or to one another for Ash Wednesday. We will also leave some ashes on the bench for those of you would like to pick up ashes prior to Ash Wednesday.

Our Ash Wednesday services will be held at 12 pm and 5:30 pm on Wednesday, February 17. We will send out the important links and bulletins prior to this important day.

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## COMING FORUMS

**January 31 — "Print Town":** There has been printing and publishing in Brattleboro since the 1790s, and as Brattleboro moved down from the safety of the West Brattleboro hills to the shores of the Connecticut, paper making, printing, and publishing became one of the town's major industries. This continued into the 1970s and the words business is still important to the area today. However, many people in town don't know about this. A new book, "Print Town," has been published to rectify this problem. This forum will share the story of the development of this project and the related walking/driving trail, and it will give some idea of what is in the book. During breakouts, we will share what we personally remember of this history and how it relates to us. Led by parishioner Andy Burrows, a member of the National Endowment for the Humanities' Brattleboro Words Project, which led to the publication of "Print Town."

**February 7 — Come and Meet your Vestry**

**Members!** On January 24, we will elect three new Vestry members - Steve Guerriero, Annie Landenberger and Alan McBean. During this Forum all the Vestry Members will introduce themselves, share about their recent Vestry Retreat, and be available for your questions, comments and ideas for 2021.

**February 14 — Mardi Gras Customs:** Since we as a parish couldn't gather to celebrate Mardi Gras at our usual Shrove Tuesday pancake supper, The Outreach Committee decided to present a forum on Mardi Gras: its origin and meaning and how it is celebrated in different parts of the world. We hope to have a slide show at the end in which you can see children and adults from our parish wearing the masks they created from the kits we put out. We encourage you to send your digital pictures to [Judydavidson3d@gmail.com](mailto:Judydavidson3d@gmail.com) so we can enjoy your creativity! Come join us and feel free to wear your own masks and beads to help celebrate!

**February 21 and 28:** These Forums will be the first for the Lenten season, which begins on February 17, Ash Wednesday.

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## MARDI GRAS MASKS

The Outreach Committee usually celebrates Mardi Gras with a fundraiser pancake supper on Shrove Tuesday, the day before Ash



Wednesday. In the last few years, we have included making Mardi Gras masks as a fun activity for children and grownups! Although we can't be together this year, we had 40 masks, feathers and beads left over so we decided to continue the mask tradition.

Starting Sunday February 1, there will be a plastic bin at the church office door filled with bags with a mask, feathers, beads and some instructions for parents.

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Prioritizing the parish children, we are asking parents to pick up bags for their family that first week in February. Starting February 8, anyone in the parish can pick up a bag and make a mask.

All are invited to take a digital picture of themselves in their creations and to send them digitally (with names) to Judy Davidson (judydavidson3d@gmail.com) to be assembled into a slide show for the Adult Forum on February 14 which will be called "Mardi Gras Customs." Have fun!!

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### CONGRATULATIONS MARGERY AND GEORGE!

On Wednesday, December 30 at 4 pm, five people, plus a bat, gathered with masks in the beautiful sanctuary to celebrate the Blessing of the Marriage of George Moore and Margery McCrum. The bat was a surprise guest who caused a stir before the service but graciously hid away somewhere while the prayers and vows were being said.

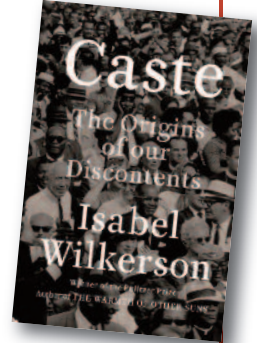
George and Margery are both members of St. Michael's, as well as (among other things) singers in St. Michael's Choir. It was a sweet joy to celebrate Margery and George's love for one another. We hope to have an in-person celebration when we are allowed to come together again.

### NEW BOOK CLUB

#### "CASTE" BY ISABEL WILKERSON

Dear Friends,

I would like to have a book club around the New York Times bestselling book, "Caste," by Isabel Wilkerson. As the jacket describes, Wilkerson, a Pulitzer Prize winning author, examines the unspoken caste system that has shaped America and shows how our lives today are still defined by the hierarchy of human divisions. It is an Oprah book club selection and gets a solid five stars on Amazon reviews.



If you would like to be a part of this book club, please email me, Nancy Ames, at [alderyacht@gmail.com](mailto:alderyacht@gmail.com) or contact the Church office at 254-6048, ext. 104. We will need to determine a reading schedule as well as times when we can meet on Zoom to talk about our experiences of reading the book. I look forward to hearing from you.

*Thanks, Nancy Ames*

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### WEDNESDAY NIGHT BIBLE STUDY, 5:45-7 PM

*Adwoa Lewis-Wilson*

For the last few months, I've been leading a Wednesday night Bible Study with Matt Miller from Community Bible Chapel. We study the Gospel lectionary for the coming Sunday in an open, vulnerable discussion format, opening with a hymn and closing with prayer. This weekly gathering of six to fourteen people has been a time for fellowship, study and growth in discipleship. All are welcome to attend once or several times. Matt and I are beginning to explore the possibility of including others in our collaborative leadership model. All are welcome to join us on Wednesdays for one week or every week. Join the Wednesday evening group here: ZOOM MEETING Webinar ID:884 4324 4413, Password:106224. Telephone: +1 929 205 6099



## NEWS OF THE PARISH

## GREETINGS SAINT MICHAEL'S FAMILY!

It was so good to be back in Vermont for a few weeks around Christmas and to see so many of you on zoom! Officially, I am now halfway through seminary with just a year and a half more to go. Although living through this pandemic is particularly hard, I am grateful for this opportunity to learn at the Seminary of the Southwest during this time.

You may have heard me say I will be doing a retreat on iconography this January. A fellow seminarian is an amateur iconographer and has been sharing her wisdom with a small group of us. Last year we did an icon of the "Areovindus, the Fire Appearing Mary." This is an unusual icon of Mary because she appears alone, not with Jesus. As a first icon it was also a simpler icon because there were no complicated details, like hands or wings. Painting, or writing, an icon is a contemplative spiritual practice with prayers offered during each step of the process. Layers of paint, made with egg, colored pigments, and Holy water from Glastonbury Abbey



blessed our work, bringing it to life layer by layer. Each step represents our collective story of God's love for us. For example, just as God breathes life into each of us, we breathed onto our clay bole adhering the gold leaf to the clay, connecting the heavenly to our humanity. As a spiritual retreat we also learned a lot about ourselves, how to embrace patience, how to accept imperfection, and how to trust the process of transformation in our creation as well as in our lives.

Seminary continues to change my thinking in ways I did not anticipate. This past semester we learned about priests as moral theologians, from an historical perspective through the years to today, and how that shapes our preaching and our everyday lives. We also learned more about how to incorporate our Bible studies work into our preaching and make it applicable for today. I am looking forward to this next semester's classes, delving deeper into liturgy, preaching, and community.

*Blessings, Darcey Mercier*

## EXPLORING OUR FAITH TOGETHER

## THE LETTERS OF PAUL, AUTHENTIC AND INAUTHENTIC

*Valerie Abrahamsen, ThD*

Most of us are familiar with St. Paul, generally known in our tradition as the Apostle to the Gentiles. One of the ways that Paul communicated with original Jesus followers in the first century was through his letters or epistles. In the Roman Empire in which Paul and those Jesus followers lived, travel and communication were not rare; people such as merchants, itinerant preachers and philosophers, rulers and their entourages, and pilgrims of some religious groups all made use of the vast road system. We can witness this scenario in the Acts of the Apostles, even though scholarship has shown that that document, written in the late second

century CE, does not necessarily reflect historical fact as we understand it. Therefore, Paul, who is a major figure in Acts, may not have visited every city Acts says he visited, but we know that Paul was in touch with Jesus followers in many cities throughout the Empire. Paul would have dictated his letters to a scribe, perhaps a slave, and that slave or another designated person would have traveled over those roads and delivered his letters to the congregations to be read aloud.

Over the past 150 years, scholars with various types of expertise have analyzed the manuscripts of the New (Christian) Testament, where Paul's letters are found,

## EXPLORING OUR FAITH TOGETHER

in their original languages and in relationship to other ancient literature of the first few centuries. The manuscripts, which now “live” in museums and libraries throughout the world, number in the thousands, are in various levels of completeness, readability and physical condition, often bear marginal “editorial” notes by the scribes who copied them (usually in monasteries and convents), and frequently demonstrate discrepancies.



Does it really matter which letters were written by Paul and which ones were not? After all, some of the sentiments in the non-Pauline letters are important, worthy of respect and even beautiful.

Some of us in the field of New Testament and early church history would maintain that, yes, authenticity does matter. The theological stances in the letters can be completely different if read as a whole (rather than read

Consequently, this type of scholarly analysis can determine with some degree of accuracy when ancient letters and other documents were written and circulated, where they may have originated, how they were received, and when they may have been recognized by the larger church as authoritative. Since Paul most likely visited and/or wrote to the early congregations between 50 and 60 CE and died in Rome between 62 and 64, we can conclude that any letters that are proven, by evidence, to have only circulated after 62–64 were not written by him.

Therefore, based on these criteria, these are the letters that most scholars agree were written or dictated by Paul: Romans, I Corinthians, II Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, I Thessalonians, and Philemon.

It can be confusing in church settings that the other letters — II Thessalonians, I Timothy, II Timothy, Titus and sometimes Hebrews — are claimed to also be authentic. The beloved King James Version of the Bible, for instance, attributes these letters to Paul, as do some modern editions of the Bible. The Fundamentalist “wing” of the Christian church generally promulgates this view, and it can be these traditional views that are picked up most readily in an internet search. There is some scholarly debate about Colossians, since it appears to have been circulating around the same time as the authentic letters, but it is most closely related to Ephesians — which was written between 80 and 100 CE, long after Paul’s death.

piecemeal as we do during our services). At the very least, Paul’s words have had and continue to have a great deal of influence in Western civilization. To take one vital example, think of the regulations about women. Both Ephesians and Colossians contain commands that are still followed by millions of self-proclaimed Christians throughout our country and the world: “Wives, be subject to your husbands” (Eph. 5, Col. 3). And I Timothy 2 goes even further: “Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent.”

An in-depth examination of Paul’s true stance on women is outside the scope of this article; suffice it to say that Paul actually greatly respected the women around him (see Romans 16), and women were leaders and co-workers with Paul in several of the congregations to which he wrote.

Sometimes it takes a while for scholarship to find its way into the churches. We in the Episcopal tradition, and in many others, have fortunately decided that women can indeed be leaders in the church, and Western civilization has allowed women to have leadership roles in the secular world after centuries of patriarchy. If we were to bring scholarship even further into our churches, we would, I hope, make the appropriate distinctions in all of our written and spoken venues between what St. Paul really wrote and what was transmitted falsely under his name — after his death.

## EXPLORING OUR FAITH TOGETHER

## LECTIONARY FOR FEBRUARY

**Sunday, February 7:**

Isaiah 40:21–31 Psalm 147:1–12, 21c;  
1 Corinthians 9:16–23; Mark 1:29–39

**Sunday, February 14:**

2 Kings 2:1–12, Psalm 50:1–6, 2  
Corinthians 4:3–6, Mark 9:2–9

**Sunday, February 21:**

Genesis 9:8–17, Psalm 25:1–9, 1  
Peter 3:18–22, Mark 1:9–15

**Sunday, February 28:**

Genesis 17:1–7, 15–16; Psalm 22:22–30;  
Romans 4:13–25; Mark 8:31–38

## FEBRUARY 2021 CELEBRATIONS

## BIRTHDAYS

February 1	Steven Meyer
February 7	Chris Landin
February 8	Emma Allen
February 9	Richard Burtis, Susan Wilson
February 10	Sissi Loftin
February 11	Alan McBean, Jayne Fritz
February 12	Robert Anderson
February 13	Cliff Wood
February 16	Greg Allen
February 19	Ross Kinney
February 20	Laura Andrews
February 24	Kirsten Mattson
February 25	Anne Cook
February 26	Paul Love, Charlene Kemp, Corey Nasman
February 28	Leigh Marthe
February 29	Asa Taggert



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**STM** *The Guardian* is published monthly by St. Michael's Episcopal Church. News items, announcements, articles, etc. should be submitted to [jeanie@st.michaels-vt.org](mailto:jeanie@st.michaels-vt.org) by the 15th of the month for consideration.

*The Guardian mailing list:* Contact Jeanie Crosby with address changes or requests to be added or removed from *The Guardian* mailing list. [jeanie@stmichaels-vt.org](mailto:jeanie@stmichaels-vt.org) or 802-254-6048.

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# The Guardian

a Christ-centered community of practice awakening to the abiding presence of God



## OUR WORSHIP TOGETHER ONLINE

SUNDAYS	8:00 am	Quiet service of prayer and virtual Morning Prayer or Eucharist
	10:15 am	Prayer, music and virtual Morning Prayer or Eucharist.
WEEKDAY MORNINGS	8:00 am	Morning Prayer
WEEKDAY EVENINGS	5:00 pm	Evening Prayer
THURSDAYS	5:30–6:00 pm	Contemplative service of chanting, silence, and prayer