

February/March 2026

# The Guardian

*Shield the joyous!*

(from An Order for Compline, *BCP*.)

## ALTERING OUR AMBITIONS

*It was the middle of January and there was nothing to look forward to.... There was nothing left of Christmas but the cold.... The cold didn't invent anything like the summer has a habit of doing and it didn't disclose anything like the spring. It lay powerfully encamped — waiting, altering one's ambitions, encouraging ends. The cold made for an ache, a restlessness and an irritation, and thinking that fell in odd and unemployable directions.*

—from “About Friends” by Joy Williams

Every week I receive an email from the literary magazine, *The Paris Review*, with an excerpt from a poem or a short story from a past issue. When I glanced at the email from last week, I found these words from a short story written by Joy Williams back in 1974. Williams’ description of how it feels to be in the middle of January was a gift to me.

While I appreciate real winter weather, even the cold and the wind, there are times when it seems that my soul needs to be exfoliated just like my skin, shedding dead layers of dullness and scrubbing away old habits. By the time Lent arrives, I am ready for it — ready to begin again with new resolve to deepen my commitment in following Jesus, even towards what may be difficult and painful.

This year, we have four adults and two teenagers who have been meeting with me twice a month since September in a class called the Catechumenate. They are preparing to be baptized at the Easter Vigil on April 4. I have been so inspired by their commitment and their passion and their desire to seek life in Christ. As I understand it, Lent was created because baptized Christians, observing the zeal of catechumens, realized that they too needed a season to repent and recommit to their own baptismal vows, their own lives in Christ.

In this issue of the *Guardian*, you will find many different ways that you deepen your commitment to Christ and renew your love for God, one another and all creation in the approaching Season of Lent. I hope you will join together with your siblings in Christ and say YES to Christ’s invitation of renewal and life abundant.

*Mary*  
— Mary Lindquist, Rector

## NEWS OF THE PARISH

**ASH WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 18**  
**SERVICES AT 12 NOON AND 5:30 PM**

The Season of Lent begins with Ash Wednesday which lands this year on February 18. Ash Wednesday, a reminder of human mortality and the need for reconciliation with God, marks the beginning of the penitential Lenten season and is commonly observed with ashes and fasting. The forty-day period represents Christ's time of temptation in the wilderness. The liturgy, which includes the imposition of ashes and Holy Eucharist, will be offered at St. Michael's at 12 noon and 5:30 pm (with music). All are welcome.

STM

**MARCH MADNESS WITH THE MYSTICS:**

How can we listen more intently to God's call?

Please join us in a Lenten study of the history of Christian mysticism using Jennifer Hornjak Wojciechowski's book, *Tending the Garden, a History of Christian Mysticism*, as our guide. In accessible prose, Wojciechowski introduces this complex subject by exploring the lives and writings of mystics within eight overarching themes: prayer, escape, leadership, politics, intellect, literature, a changed life, and controversy. While Wojciechowski's writing is academic and well-documented, her writing style also encourages us to consider how we, individually and collectively, can listen more intently to God's call through the mystics' spiritual practices and examples. We hope that the class will offer an opportunity to learn, to reflect, and to ponder next steps on our walk with Christ.

- The class will begin on Sunday, February 22, after church from 12–2 pm in the Choir Room, when we will discuss the book's introduction and enjoy a simple lunch together.
- Following this introduction, we will SKIP a week and begin meeting every WEDNESDAY from

4:30–6:00 pm in MARCH, thus the title, March Madness with the Mystics! Our Wednesday gatherings will be in the Chapel. We hope you'll join us!

Please purchase your book prior to the beginning of the class on Sunday, February 22. If possible, please read the introduction in preparation for our gathering on February 22. St. Michael's has ten books available in the office for \$20 each. If purchasing the book is a hardship, St. Michael's can gift you a book. This book study is led by Laura Frey, Karin Bleeker and Mary Lindquist.

STM

**FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS:**  
**ADULT FORUM LENTEN SERIES**

**9–10 AM SUNDAYS IN THE SEASON OF LENT**

Every year during the season of Lent we host a program reflecting on the life and Passion of our Lord, Jesus Christ. This year under the heading, *For Such a Time as This: An Emergency Devotional* our Lenten series will be a time of prayer, contemplation, conversation and sharing about the new realities of an emerging world order that threatens literally the very ground we walk on, and how we as Christians can respond boldly, humanely and faithfully in our daily lives. It will take place between 9–10 am on the Sundays between February 22–March 22 in our Meeting Room.

It is based upon the writings of theologian Hanna Reichel from her new book of the same title, released only a few months ago. Each chapter is based on liturgy we practice weekly, and we will be asked to share more from our hearts than our heads.

If you choose you can find the book at Everyone's Books at a discounted price. It is usually front and center on the front counter. Craig Hammond will be our host, with help from all who attend.

## NEWS OF THE PARISH

**2026 WOMEN'S RETREAT SATURDAY**  
**FEBRUARY 28, 9 AM–3 PM**  
**HALLELUJAH FARM RETREAT CENTER,**  
**WEST CHESTERFIELD, NH**

The women of St. Michael's are invited to come together for a day of rest, renewal and reflection on Saturday, February 28, from 9 am–3 pm. During this Lenten retreat, we will explore Psalm 119:25 — *My soul clings to the dust, O Lord, Give me life according to your word through writing, prayer and conversation. In what ways do we cling to the dust? How does this clinging prevent us from experiencing the life God intends for us?*

To register for this retreat, please email Susie Webster-Toleno at [parishadmin@stmichaelsvermont.org](mailto:parishadmin@stmichaelsvermont.org). Please send a check for \$35 to St. Michael's (memo

Women's Retreat) to help cover the cost of the retreat if you are able. Enrollment is limited to twenty-four and space will be allotted on a first come, first served basis. This retreat is led by Mary Lindquist and Erin Pesut.

**LENTEN SUNDAY**  
**FOOD & TOILETRY COLLECTION**

In Advent, St. Michael's asked parishioners to bring food and toiletry items to church to collect for our local community. It was a wonderful, incarnational way we can participate in offering love and support to our neighbors. We will be doing this again in the Lenten Season — stay tuned as to what items we will be collecting each Sunday!

*Genesis Bible Study at the Brattleboro Co-Op Cafe*



## NOTES FROM THE DECEMBER 18, 2025 VESTRY MEETING

John Spooner led our opening devotional time with reflections on the poem “What To Do In Darkness” by Marilyn Chandler McEntyre.

We received a comprehensive treasurer’s report, highlighting that 2025 operating income and pledge income were on or above target, with a positive net income to date. The draft 2026 Budget was reviewed. Presenting the actual 2026 Budget and opportunities for discussion are planned for Sunday January 18 after Coffee Hour. Plans for maintenance and capital improvements were discussed, with a long-term plan to be developed separately.

Mary’s Rector’s Report included updates on Vestry nominees, the upcoming Annual Meeting, community service initiatives, and Lenten programming. Proposed Vestry nominees are Michael Hightower, Rosie Wojcik, Ricky Davidson and Annamarie Pluhar with the usual voting to be held during the Annual Meeting which will take place on January 25 in the undercroft (but also with a Zoom link). For in-person attendees, the Vestry is providing a lunch of simple victuals. Mary also reviewed the “Compassion in Action”

initiative (currently at the brainstorming level) — thinking about ways members of the congregation can organize to serve the community through concrete and direct outreach ministries (diaper drives, etc.). A tentative theme for the Lenten season is “March Madness with the Mystics.”

Susan Heimer gave the Senior Warden report, noting ongoing winter shelter operations and congregational action following up on the previous “Responding in Faith to Our Neighbors” discussions. The Junior Warden (John Spooner) reported that the new church office computers have been successfully installed (keeping up with the ever-evolving software needs). There was strong choir participation at the service of Lessons and Carols (so much that the choir may need more robes!).

Committee reports mentioned recent activities by the Healing Team, Elder Ministry, and the ongoing Men’s Group. The meeting concluded with writing thank-you notes and a closing prayer offered by Margery McCrum.

*Respectfully submitted, Chris Meyer*

### St. Nicholas Day



## 2026 LENT-EASTER DEVOTIONAL

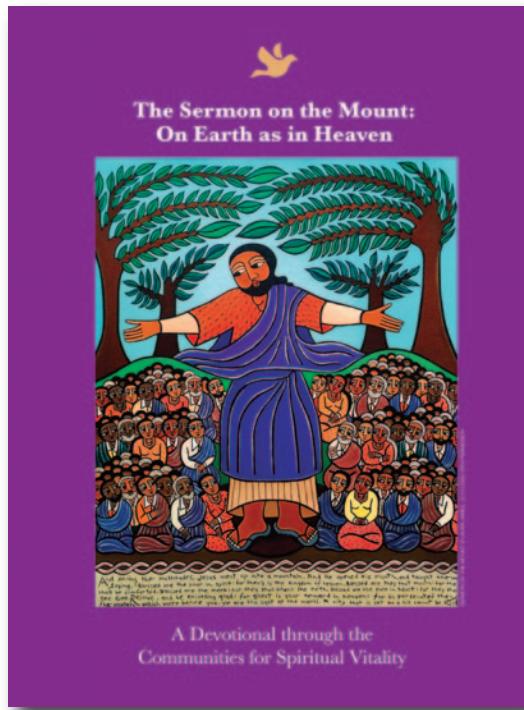
### FROM THE COMMUNITIES FOR SPIRITUAL VITALITY

**W**hat ever will you do to nourish yourself spiritually this Lent?

Hooray: The Communities for Spiritual Vitality 2026 Lenten Devotional on the Sermon on the Mount is here for you. It is a vibrant resource in word (with reflections from over 50 writers, including the New England bishops and the Brothers of the Society of St. John the Evangelist) and image (with licensed color art from various artists.) I hope you'll consider using it to deepen your Lenten experience and connect with other disciples across New England whose voices are reflected.

Here's how to engage with this resource:

- Find it online:  
<https://www.communitiesforspiritualvitality.org/resources#devotionals>



- Order a print copy for donation — please email [communities@spiritualvitality.org](mailto:communities@spiritualvitality.org) or sign up in the Common Room.
- Join the **Wednesday morning Bible Study at 8:30 am at the Brattleboro Food Coop**. Beginning on Ash Wednesday on February 18, we will pivot from Genesis to explore the Sermon with the devotional. We'll also meet every week.
- You may also choose to join folks from the whole diocese on **Thursday evenings at 6:00 pm on the Green**

**Mountain Online Abbey** for a 7-week formation series using the devotional. The sessions will be 6:00–7:45 pm from Thursday, February 19 to April 9, inclusive. (During Holy Week we will meet on Wednesday, April 1, instead of Thursday).



*Judith Reichmann with the Leitermann-Long children*



*Wreath-making for the Greening of the Church*

## AFTER READING LAURUS

Something doesn't change because we describe it a certain way. We will, though.

On his mediterranean voyage to Jerusalem in Eugene Vodolazkin's novel *Laurus*, the protagonist Arseny, who has only known fresh water from inland Russia, is curious about the content and form of salt water as he feels and tastes the ocean spray that falls on his hands.

*Seawater was another color, and it smelled different and even behaved in another way. It did not have fine river ripples. It varied from river and even lake water as much as a crane varies from a sparrow.*

Throughout the novel, Arseny is at once intimate with life of all forms and stupefied by it. He is certain of how to heal random people he meets on his journey, whether from leprosy or the plague, but experience is constantly new and startling to him.

For a whole page, Arseny, the captain of the ship on which he sails, and two German pilgrims debate the form and relationship between fresh and salt water. Each describes salt and fresh water as if they were two characters containing qualities of humility and power, deference and dominance. The captain maintains that fresh water is "weaker than salt water," a claim he justifies because seawater from the English Channel obstructs the flow of water from the River Seine. One of the pilgrims believes it's possible that "fresh water thinks salt water is disgusting and so retreats when

faced with it." The other pilgrim wondering if "a river expresses its deference to its father — the sea — by yielding the road to it."

What begins this whole scene is Arseny's tactile experience. A new flavor and texture: sea water. The experience is observational and embodied. For the captain and the pilgrims, this is an issue of judgement. Though they're offering different points of view, each is focusing on two forces somehow working against each other, and they are concerned with which explanation is correct. Eventually one of the pilgrims asks Arseny his opinion of currents.

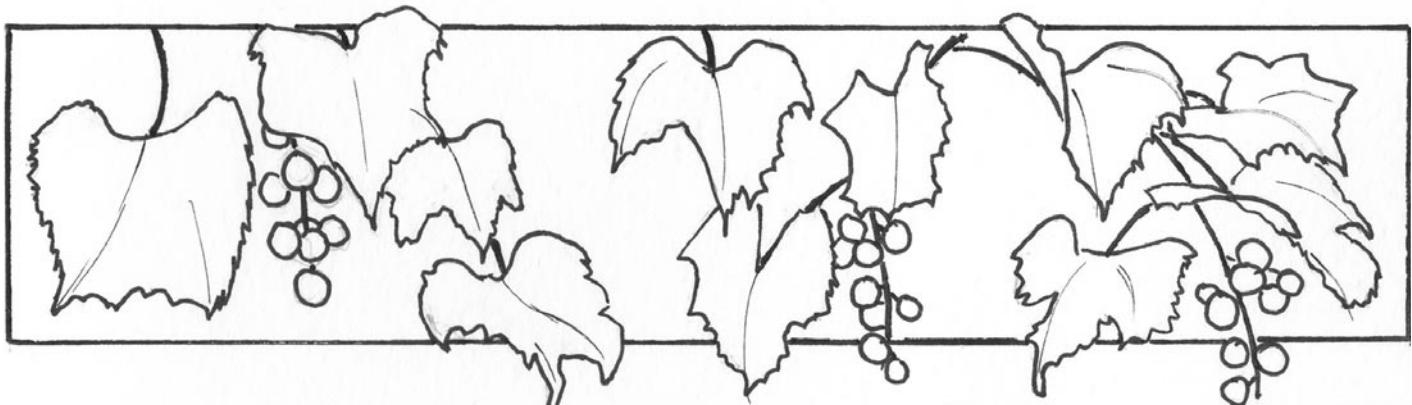
*Our earth is reminiscent of the human body...with canals running all through the inside, just as blood vessels run through the body. No matter where a person starts to dig up the earth, he will certainly strike water.*

This isn't a question of rightness for Arseny. It's an opportunity to learn that this new experience is another representation of the universality of existence.

The seawater doesn't change because of the debate about whether it's stronger than fresh water. Arseny continues to change because he learns another example of how he is one within the creation and creation is one within him.

Thanks be to God.

—Gabriel Sistare



*Our Christmas Angels and the Holy Family*

## WILLIAM STEARNS

(PARISHIONER PROFILE BY ANNIE LANDENBERGER)

William Stearns entered the world as William MacPherson, born of a life-celebrating fling to two twenty-four-year-olds who had endured the worst in World War II. Sanguine, he says, “I was conceived out of happiness.” Born in 1947, William was adopted by James and Eleanor Stearns and began his life in Brattleboro at fifteen months. “The day I was adopted, I won the lottery.” He especially recalls the great influence of his mother, a cradle Episcopalian, a Middlebury College alum, a teacher at Brattleboro High School and, perhaps most significantly, a free thinker. She married James Stearns who was the organist at Center Congregational Church, a denomination of choice for the Stearns in America since the early 1600s.

William attended Brattleboro schools until he went to Northfield Mount Hermon, then to a school in England for a post-grad year. From there he went on to Middlebury College to major in English Literature and Theater Arts.

During the Vietnam War, William followed his pacifist mother’s influence and listened to his own heart as a conscious objector — a status that found him serving two years on staff at the Brattleboro Retreat. He stayed on and soon became the Retreat’s VP of Human Resources.

Williams’ more recent work — beyond ample local theater engagement and volunteerism — has been with the Chester-based NewsBank where he’s still a senior editor.

Having been christened at and attended Center Congregational, William soon migrated with his family to St. Michael’s. Fr. John Norris was the pastor, an old-world Anglican with whom James Stearns felt an affinity, as did William who loved the incense, the ceremony, the language of the *King James Bible* and of the 1929 Book of Common Prayer. In those days, the choir was seated up on the altar, behind a rood screen, and the organ pipes hung on the wall above where our

rector Mary, sits. Even so, he reports, the Episcopal Church at the time was “not friendly to queer people. And they weren’t friendly to women priests!”

In time Fr. Steele Martin came in as rector and started to modernize the liturgy. That didn’t sit well with William’s father. Given that and his being away at school, William’s involvement at St. Michael’s was next to nil for some time — especially as he travelled the country and the world, garnering life-shaping experiences.

“I wasn’t interested” in the church “until many years later when Fr. Thomas was there and word began to get out that there was a gay priest at St. Michael’s.” His old friend Betsy Bates encouraged him to try coming back to St. Michael’s: when he did, he felt comfort and acceptance.

About ten years ago, William moved from Upper Dummerston to an apartment near St. Michael’s, in the neighborhood he grew up in. He recalls buying a hefty old solid cherry dresser at the church tag sale which “the nicest people in the world” then moved for him. “I kept that in my heart, and a year later I made an appointment to visit with Mary, whom he “liked very much. There are things said that I don’t believe: I won’t gender the creator,” for instance, “and Mary was so open to this. I love it when she says at the end of the service: ‘Go with God who loves you like a mother.’”

William, grateful for the ways the Church is going green, has been part of the aging ministry, the refugee ministry, and the ushering team. And his rich voice has delivered many a reading. In keeping with his personal mission to help ensure all have access to housing and nourishment, he’s a regular at Loaves and Fishes.

It was a search for community, too, that landed William back at St. Michael’s. “These are wonderful people who put their time and money where their mouths are.”

# HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO...

February 1	Steven Meyer
February 2	Olive Hightower
February 3	Talley Summerlin, Jesse Ridgway
February 7	Chris Landin
February 8	Emma Allen, Susan Marshall
February 9	Susan Wilson
February 1	Alan McBean, Jayne Fritz
February 12	Craig Irvine
February 13	Cliff Wood
February 16	Greg Allen
February 17	Lars Hunter
February 18	Carol Maniscalchi
February 19	Ross Kinney
February 20	Laura Andrews
February 21	Bev Bakke
February 22	Theron Southard
February 23	Judy Davidson
February 26	Charlene Kemp
February 28	Leigh Marthe
February 29	Asa Taggart
March 2	Susan Kochinskas
March 3	Christine Hart, Kiersten McKenney
March 4	Jenna Webb
March 5	Joshua Fritz
March 7	Ladd Osborne, John Linscheid
March 10	Ann Ely
March 11	Teri Robinson, Marie Lawrence
March 12	Gay Maxwell
March 15	Benson Bobrick
March 16	Chris Chapman
March 17	Gabriel Sistare
March 18	Erin Pesut
March 19	Karen Guthrie
March 20	Bob Walker
March 22	Bruce Lawrence
March 24	James Wilmott, Joan Pinilla, Margery McCrum, Sherill Wilson
March 25	Kate LeBlanc
March 28	Tom Woodbury, Elizabeth Moore
March 30	Craig Newbert
March 31	Jan Bennett

# VESTRY

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**Please see Thursday E-Notes  
and Sunday Bulletins for other  
important dates and news.**

*The Guardian* is published by St. Michael's Episcopal Church. News items, announcements, articles, etc. should be submitted to [parishadmin@stmichaelsvermont.org](mailto:parishadmin@stmichaelsvermont.org) by the 10th of the month for consideration.

*The Guardian mailing list:* Contact Susie Webster-Toleno with address changes or requests to be added or removed from *The Guardian* mailing list.

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# The Guardian

St. Michael's is a Christ-centered community of practice awakening to the abiding presence of God.



## OUR WORSHIP TOGETHER

SUNDAYS	8:00 am	Quiet service of prayer and Eucharist
	10:15 am	Prayer, music and Eucharist (in-person and online)
WEEKDAYS	8:00 am	Morning Prayer (online) and Tues.–Thurs. in Chapel
WEDNESDAYS	11:30 am	Centering Prayer (in-person)
	12:00	Eucharist (in-person)
THURSDAYS	5:30 pm	Contemplative service (in-person and online)
SECOND THURSDAYS	7:30 pm	Compline service
SATURDAYS	8:00 am	Centering Prayer (in-person)