



St. James' Episcopal Church • 11815 Seven Locks Road, Potomac, MD 20854-3340 • 301-762-8040 • [www.stjamespotomac.org](http://www.stjamespotomac.org)



## Reflection from The Rev. Todd Thomas

### *An Ordination by the Numbers*

Six years ago I was introduced to the Episcopal Diocese of Washington. Five years ago I chatted with Bishop Mariann and Rev. Sari at St. John's Norwood about being ordained in the Episcopal Church. Four years ago I resigned my pastorate in Bethesda to begin discernment with St. John's.

One and a half years ago you all welcomed us so warmly as guests on a Sunday and Rev. Meredith soon welcomed me to St. James' Potomac as an Intern. One year ago I passed my General Ordination Exams. Six months ago I was ordained a Transitional Deacon, and just a few weeks ago (December 15) I was made a Priest.

There were all kinds of twists and turns along the way, but the numbers are a reminder that

when we join God we also join God's timing. I would have sped through parts and skipped others, but every step of the way was important. Now having been ordained to the priesthood, Teresa and I are relieved and grateful, and especially thankful for our St. James' family.

Many have asked me, "What's next?" I'm going to continue to work for the Bishop supporting young adult ministries as I've done, and also supporting the work of revitalizing parishes. For now, St. James' is our home parish and we'll be with you every chance we get. Thank you for welcoming our family and sharing the joy of our ordination journey. As Rev. James often says, "It's a pleasure serving God with you."

*Rev. Todd*



## Mental Health Ministries

**Mental Health Praise Worship Service**  
**Sunday, January 19, 10:30 a.m.**  
**Lunch follows in the parish hall**

Much is happening with Mental Health Ministries at St. James'.

Before the end of the year, the Mental Health Leaders' Group (with guidance from Lisa Goodkind), identified and chose to support a pilot program called "NAMI in the Lobby," that is being started by Montgomery County chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI). This program seeks to address a real need for support that people in this area have when a mental health crisis happens.

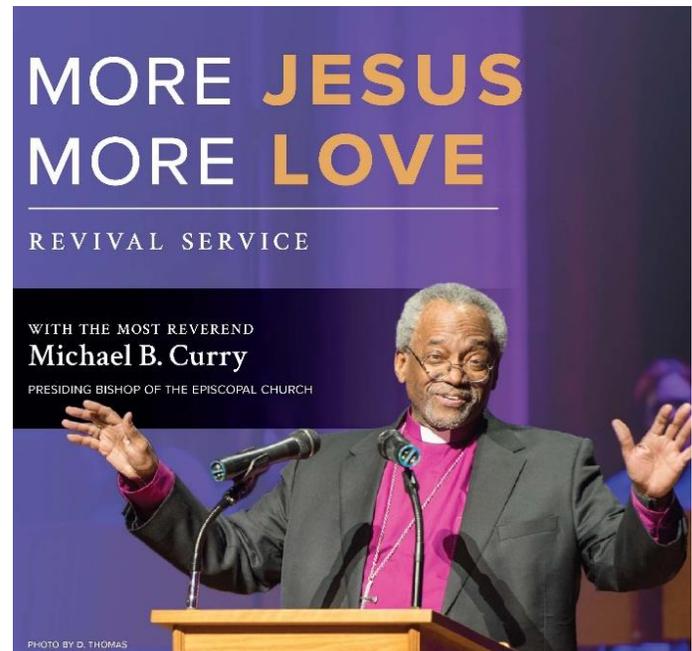
**On Sunday, January 19**, at a special 10:30 service we will praise God for supporting us through all our struggles and hardships, and through mental health issues in particular. This service is one of the initiatives that has been prepared by the Mental Health Ministries Leaders' Group, and we hope that everyone attends and brings friends and neighbors.

After the 10:30 service there will be a catered lunch with brief presentations by some of the leaders about another initiative coming up soon that people can participate in and someone from NAMI will also speak about the "NAMI in the Lobby" program that we are helping get off the ground in Montgomery County. Please join us.

**Our FaithTalk at 9:15 a.m. on January 19** will be about "Supporting Loved Ones with Mental Health Conditions," led by Lisa Goodkind in the parish hall.

## Shared Bus Available to the "More Jesus More Love" Revival, Sunday, January 26

**RSVP by Wednesday, January 15**



**To catch a ride on a shared bus to the 2:00 p.m. revival, RSVP** to the St. James' parish office at [office@stjamespotomac.org](mailto:office@stjamespotomac.org) or 301-762-8040 by Wednesday, January 15. The more signups we have, the cheaper the ride! The bus leaves from St. Luke's Episcopal Church, 6060 Grosvenor Lane, Bethesda.

This event is free but requires a ticket for entry. Tickets are limited to six per person and available on a first come, first served basis. Tickets and information are at [www.edow.org](http://www.edow.org).

Revival location: Entertainment and Sports Arena, 1100 Oak St SE, Washington, DC 20032.

## Do You Have Electrical Expertise?

The church Facilities Commission has an urgent need for electrical expertise and advice, and would appreciate hearing from anyone who might be able to help. Please contact Ken Van Valkenburgh or the church office, [office@stjamespotomac.org](mailto:office@stjamespotomac.org).





## Reflection from our Junior Warden, Ken Van Valkenburgh

### New Year, New Beginnings

January is always one of my favorite times of the year because everything on the calendar starts anew. With the start of the new year, I find it a great time to look back for perspective. Then I make an action plan to look ahead, whether personally, professionally or, for me spiritually, as I take on the role of Junior Warden here at St. James.'

I can't believe that this is the start of my family's 24<sup>th</sup> year worshipping at St. James.' Where does the time go?!?! I cannot think of a time when there was so much positive energy in our parish, or so much activity across all aspects of our church life. We are, in my opinion, in such a "healthy" place at St. James' and I believe that 2020 will be our best year yet! And when I say healthy I mean financially as well as you, our St. James' family. Our balance sheet as well as our membership are both growing. And it's no secret why: we have terrific clergy and vestry leadership and the culture is warm and inviting.

My role in 2020 as your Junior Warden will be to quarterback the facilities/buildings and grounds/maintenance concerns of the church. I want to thank everyone who has worked in this area of the church up until now. I see and know how much time and effort is needed and has been expended and I am so thankful to each of you.

We have such tremendous facilities on our "campus" and are blessed to have the physical buildings as well as the greenery, and the sheer space we have inside and outside. I often think of other parishes I have visited over the years that have nothing close to what we enjoy. We are the envy of many visitors who come and enjoy what we have. Over the years I've heard them tell me so, and with great reason. We have great facilities!

That said, I think it is always human nature to either want more to make what we have now even better... and then there is always just plain upkeep. I know that we have another committee

undertaking the potential changes that we could make to our campus/facilities to enhance what we have. While this is happening, I am going to do my best to be certain that we are enjoying what we have to the utmost.

I do have one request of each of you reading this message:

### Would you like to become part of a larger committee to facilitate what we do with parish facilities?

To make the request simpler, there are some clear categories of facilities.

- There will be a garden and grounds committee, with the memorial garden as a subset. Thanks to all of those who work on this area of the church.
- We will also have a buildings committee. As a subset of buildings we have folks here who have been invaluable as it relates to our air conditioning and heating. (It just so happens that one of our parishioners does this for a living, and I think we would be lost without him (*thanks Andrew Huck*)).
- Similarly if you have any expertise in the electrical area or the area of plumbing, you would also be a huge help. I promise it would not be a huge amount of your time; it's your industry knowledge for each discipline that we would tap into when the need might arise. When there is a fix needed we need to have someone on our team who can speak the language of the hired contractor who will do the actual work.

Please give my "ask" some thought and let me know your thoughts. The more hands on deck, the lighter the load.

Many thanks again to each of you already giving back to St. James' in this fashion. I am looking forward to hearing from those of you who would like to get involved in 2020!

## Guess who's coming to Sunday School?!

Beginning in January, the clergy are coming to lead Children's Chapel during worship!

That's right! Whichever clergy person is not preaching upstairs will join in the fun downstairs with the kids!

**Why are we doing this?** First and foremost, we want to get to know the children better: to let them know they are loved, to know they belong, and also to know that worshiping God is about being in relationship—with God and with one another. We want to learn their interests and their questions about God, so we can encourage them in their faith.

We also want the children to get to know us: that we are approachable, friendly and even fun, offering a safe place to share hopes, fears and worries—as well as joys and celebrations.

Finally, we want parents to know that their children's faith formation is important to us—and

that we are involved and engaged in what the children are learning and doing.

**What are they learning?** Using the curriculum *Weaving God's Promises*, this winter and spring the children will be hearing stories about Jesus: stories of call and stories of miracles. They will also be learning about Jesus' teachings and the Kingdom of God.

**How you can help!** Come join the fun! Even a once-a-month commitment will help! Your clergy will tell the story of the week during Chapel time, but help is still needed to reinforce the story in the classroom. The curriculum offers fun and easy ways to engage the children, and there is nothing like a good theological conversation with kids to encourage adults to think about their faith!

For more information, see Marisol Castro or Rev. Meredith.

May God bless our children!

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## Introvert on the Altar: Why it's Great to LEM

By Kirsten Hall

I don't think "LEM" is a verb, but it's a great thing to do, even if you don't think you are a "people person."

Lay Eucharistic Ministers—chalice bearers—offer the wine at communion during worship services. If you can put on a robe (we have many sizes or we'll order one for you) and bend over a little bit, you can do this.

When another LEM suggested to me that I try this ministry, I was reluctant because I didn't think my heart was in the right place all the time. I was told, "That's not how it works. It's an outside-in thing." It seems our hearts are made right by serving, not that we must already be perfectly right to serve. Thank heavens.

Lo and behold, I do like and love everyone more when I am serving. Lo and behold, I become more lovable myself. This is a good thing to do.

For me, it is also a relief that there are only a few words to say and I don't have to know

everyone's names. When I say, "The blood of Christ, the cup of salvation," people smile and say, "Amen." No chit-chat.

Also, if that isn't enough, the view from the altar is worth checking out. The faces of St. James' are wonderful to behold: serious thinkers, laughers, busy kids, sleepers, clappers, yawners, huggers, helpers, and exuberant singers are all in full view. At the altar our acolytes and fellow servers are learning and growing. We laugh a lot together over our little fumbles—no one else notices them.

After the service we carry a few of the vessels into the sacristy where the Altar Guild does its good work. We're a family serving a meal, washing the dishes, and going home well fed.

If you'd like to learn this ministry, please speak to any of the clergy or call the parish office. We need you at the altar!



## Sunday Morning Faith Talk

Join us from 9:15 until 10:00 a.m. each Sunday in the parish hall meeting room as we study Bishop Mariann's book, *Receiving Jesus: The Way of Love*.

The bishop has been working hard this year on a diocesan-wide strategic plan, which will be shared at the Diocesan Annual Convention at the end of January. This plan is grounded in *The Way of Love*. With this in mind, this is an ideal time to revisit and go deeper with this practice, so that St. James' can fully engage in the bishop's plan.

*The Way of Love* is a way of life. It is a return to the ancient pathways of the Rules of Life that followers of Jesus have observed for centuries. They knew the power of commitment to a core set of practices—*Turn, Learn, Pray, Worship, Bless, Go, Rest*—and the power of gathering in a small group where you find love and support for living into these commitments. That is what we hope to offer.

Through our study of Bishop Mariann's book, we will connect with each of these practices, as we read her stories that make them approachable and real. We will meet every Sunday through February 23, pausing on January 19, Mental Health Sunday, for "Supporting Loved Ones with Mental Health Conditions," led by Lisa Goodkind at 9:15 a.m. in the parish hall.

We hope you will join us! Reading the book is suggested, but not required.

## Thank You!

Thank you to all those who helped make our Christmas services so special: our Flower Guild members and volunteers, Altar Guild, pageant directors and volunteers, musicians, readers, intercessors, lay Eucharistic ministers, acolytes, ushers, tellers, and everyone else who had a hand in making it all happen. It was a merry Christmas!



## Book Club, January 26

*All This I Will Give to You*, by Spanish author Dolores Redondo, is the book up for discussion Sunday, January 26, 6:45-8:15 p.m. in the parish hall. Nominated for several major awards and already translated into thirty-five languages, this book's title came from Satan's offer to Jesus in the wilderness.

The main character, Manuel, an author, has just been notified that his husband, Alvaro, has been killed in a car accident in Galicia. That's not where he was expected to be—the first of several surprises for Manuel. Mysterious details begin to add up. Alvaro is from a titled family. Manuel inherits, and family objects.

Why did Alvaro keep this background from him? Enter a chain-smoking retired cop, an amiable priest, an "Ethel Barrymore-type evil matriarch," and a sad stray dog, along with family secrets finally exposed. If this sounds like an entertaining discussion to you (any of you!), please join the casual, group-led dissection of this prize-winning crime mystery.

The book for February 23 is *The Island of Sea Women*, by Lisa See. The multi-generational story is set in Jeju, an island off the coast of present-day South Korea. For generations, the haenyeo have been a matriarchal phenomenon of women, free-diving for sea life. The book is described as "an enthralling cultural anthropology highlighting the haenyeo... and an engrossing history of violently tumultuous twentieth-century Korea." All are welcome, as are suggestions for future choices.

## Thursday Morning Bible Study

This January the Thursday Morning Bible Group will be studying the lectionary readings that will be read during worship on the upcoming Sunday.

This is designed to be a restful, less intense study after our hard work during Advent. Led by Rev. Meredith, join us from 10:00 to 11:30 a.m. in the parish hall meeting room for this informal study and lively conversation! No preparation necessary.

## Lunch & Learn, February 4

**Stay Tuned For Details...** Tuesday, February 4, at 11:30 a.m. in the undercroft, the monthly Lunch & Learn group will gather for social time, with lunch at noon. The program will begin at approximately 12:30 p.m. Its topic and title? You'll have to stay tuned to the bulletin and/or News & Notes for that information.

One important fact to know: to ensure having the correct amount of food for the buffet lunch, you are asked to contact Sarah Padgett with your reservation (\$10.00 per person). No one will turn you away if you come without a reservation, and there is a small amount of extra food ordered. However, a problem would arise if numerous people found it impossible to call or email ahead. And only one person successfully pulled off the "loaves and fishes" coverage (some 2,000 years ago...). We'll look forward to hearing from you.

The wonderful, cheerful, do-what-you-can help from attendees is invaluable to the steering committee (Lois Van Nevel, Deb Talley, Sarah Padgett, Len Whistler, and Jo Ann Thompson). We are especially thankful for help with clean-up, allowing us to vacate the space in time for the rental group's arrival. You all are superb and have our heartfelt thanks.

Who comes to L & L? Anyone! Bring a neighbor, newcomer, or just yourself. You want to come? Good—see you there!

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## Youth Group January Calendar

- 1/12 **Youth Group** at St. Francis Episcopal Church, youth room, 6:30-8:30 p.m.; bring \$3 for dinner.
- 1/19 **Dinner Out** at Cabin John Shopping Center for middle and high school; 6:30-8:30 p.m.; bring \$5 for dinner.
- 1/25-26 **Bishop's Lock-In** at the Bishop Walker School; RSVP required for this two-day event with the Presiding Bishop.
- 1/26 **Ice Skating** at Rockville Town Center, 6:00-8:00 p.m.; dress warmly for outdoors and bring \$5 for dinner.

## Shepherd's Table Needs and Samaritan Ministries Thanksgiving Drive Update

By Joyce Graf

Volunteers are at the heart of the mission of **Shepherd's Table**. More than 2,500 people shared their time and talent last year, serving the lives of women and men who are homeless or living in poverty every day. Are you interested in making a difference in the lives of others? What gives you joy? What impact do you want to have? Shepherd's Table now provides breakfast, lunch and dinner at their location on Georgia Ave. in Silver Spring. They need volunteers. You can sign up at [www.shepherdstable.org](http://www.shepherdstable.org).

In preparation for the winter inclement season, Shepherds Table has requested a few items (no Styrofoam):

- Plates, bowls, and paper cups with lids
- Spoons/forks
- Jimmy Dean frozen breakfast sandwiches
- Portion control packets (jelly/butter/cream/sugar)

### Update on Samaritan Thanksgiving Drive

Many, many thanks to all who participated in the Thanksgiving Drive for Samaritan Ministry of Greater Washington. St. James' collected approximately 25 bags containing food and toiletries, 25 reusable grocery bags, cash donations of \$225, and 25 gift cards totaling \$625.

We received a note of thanks from Samaritan Ministries:

*Once again, you have come through for the SMGW's Thanksgiving Food Drive. We are very appreciative for all that you and the members of St. James' Episcopal Church, Potomac have done which has vastly contributed to the success of the Food Drive.*

*With much appreciation,  
Sy and Annette*

*Merry Christmas and a Happy, Healthy and prosperous NEW YEAR!*

## Vestry Highlights: Meeting of December 17, 2019

By Barry Thompson, Sr. Warden

Anselm Hennis suggested that we should surrender to the Lord's will, as did the Virgin Mary, and attain peace.

The treasurer reported the current deficit as approximately \$34,000. The \$59,800 cost of painting the exterior of the parish hall has been satisfied by borrowing from funds other than the operating fund.

**Pastoral Care** (Carolyn Ragland): Types of services provided (such as visits to senior centers, LEMs, prayer chain/prayer list for bulletins, prayer shawls, grief ministry, and clergy visits) and responsible parties having been defined; referrals from the church office can more easily be made. Collection of data on participation and quarterly reporting to parishioners will be undertaken.

**Christian Education** (Rev. Meredith Heffner for Lindsay Ragheb): The Sunday School program is being reviewed for improvement. Rev. Meredith Heffner and Rev. James Isaacs soon will conduct Children's Chapel on Sundays. Comment was made on the recent peanut butter sandwich service project and the enthusiasm engendered among the children. Adult Bible study (Thursdays) and FaithTalk (Sundays) will continue to be led by Ann Venton and Rev. Meredith.

**Missions and Outreach** (Wendy Hicks): Goal remains ten percent of Normal Operating Income (NOI). Commission has refocused distribution of funds into four "buckets" (direct assistance, mental health ministries, partnerships with other organizations, and "hands-on" activities) to better align with church goals and wishes of the congregation.

**Mental Health** (Reverend Meredith for Reve. James): The steering committee has announced a mental health-focused Eucharist. Being explored are "NAMI in the Lobby" (offering mental health representation in local hospitals) and formation of affinity groups of parishioners to promote interaction.

**Clergy Reports:** Reverend Meredith Heffner, Patrick O'Hare, and Barry Thompson will be meeting in January 2020 to begin the selection of

an architectural firm (with church experience) for the building initiative.

Ninety-six pledges (2020), totaling \$398,109, have been received. Our goal is \$425,000.

It has been a busy four weeks since the last vestry meeting: Interfaith Thanksgiving Service (St. Raphael Roman Catholic Church), Women's Film Night, Advent Quiet Day, celebration of Newton Lewis' 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary at St. James', and Todd Thomas' ordination to the priesthood.

Rev. Todd now works for Bishop Mariann but will be present at St. James' on occasion.

Our Youth Group has begun sharing activities with groups at St. Francis, and Christ Church, Rockville.

**Senior Warden:** Barry Thompson reported that the St. James' pledge to the Diocese of Washington has been corrected to 8.8% of NOI or \$60,611. St. James' recently received a check for \$3099.60 from the Greater Washington Community Fund.

**Junior Warden:** Sarah Hnatov thanked everyone for the privilege of serving as a warden, the chance to learn, and the opportunity to serve God at St. James'.

**Old Business:** The vestry approved proposed changes to our personnel manual to match those of the diocese. The vestry recognized a \$5000 increase in the deficit for 2020, reflecting correction in the diocesan pledge. Replacement of the condenser for the parish hall HVAC will cost approximately \$16,000. Modification of electrical system of St. James' Children's School is "on hold", pending evaluation of the entire parish hall system by Trunnell Electric.

**New Business:** As required, housing allowances for Reverends Meredith Heffner and James Isaacs were formally approved.

### Dates to Remember

January 19 – Mental Health-focused Eucharist

January 21 – Next Vestry Meeting



## Have you heard of the Wood Wide Web?

By John Combs

This name is a clever take on the Mycorrhizal fungi networks that exist in most forests that provide a wide range of services to the trees, shrubs and other plants in the forest.

It turns out that forests are far more communal and far more complex than most of us ever realized. The fertility of the soil is dependent on interactions between the fungi, the plants, other soil organisms as well as oxygen and moisture. “The action is underground. There beneath your feet, microbes and larger life forms create complex and dynamic communities where everyone has a dual role—eat or be eaten.”<sup>1</sup> In a 2015 book titled *The Hidden Life of Trees* Peter Wohlleben makes the statement that “the forest is a social network”<sup>2</sup>

Trees in general live much longer than the average human and therefore few of us see the full life of a forest; we see only a short window in time. What is most astonishing is the social life of the various creatures in the forest. We are familiar with animals having a social life and communicating with each other but few of us realize that trees and other forest creatures also communicate and exchange goods back and forth. Individual trees derive many valuable services by being a cooperative partner in a forest community.

Trees can pass messages to the trees that surround them and for example, warn them of an insect attack or a herbivore animal that is grazing on trees. The surrounding trees can then change the chemical mix in their leaves and reduce the damage. These messages are made possible by the existence of the mycorrhizal fungi networks that I referred to above. These fungal networks are key to the long term health of the forest and they represent a cooperative relationship between the plants and the fungi.

Most of us are aware that plants photosynthesize in a process that utilizes sunlight and chlorophyll to enable the plant to absorb carbon dioxide, water and certain chemicals to produce sugars and byproducts of oxygen and

water vapor. This process is essential to the survival of all animals that breath oxygen and provides the basic food supplies for most creatures. The mycorrhizal fungi cannot produce their own food since they are not capable of photosynthesis and they must find another way to feed themselves. They accomplish this by providing valuable services to the plants in the forest in exchange for the plants sharing their food supplies with them.

These mycorrhizal fungi networks can extend out to cover a significant area and in fact a few such networks in Pacific Northwest rainforests have been documented to cover four acres. One such fungal network in Oregon, which is estimated to be 2400 years old, extends for 2,000 acres.<sup>3</sup> If a plant such as a tree needs a mineral that does not exist within the scope of that plant’s root system, it can communicate its need to the fungi and if the fungi can locate and transmit the mineral to the plant, the fungi will be rewarded with plant produced food in the form of sugar nectar. Many of the plant roots are in contact with other plant roots and can exchange information directly or through the mycorrhizal fungi network.

It is this network and its functions that are the basis for the term “wood wide web.” These delicate fungal fibers can filter out heavy metals and other harmful substances and protect against bacteria and other destructive forms of fungi.

The trees in a forest gain valuable protection by being in a large continuous forest of many trees, shrubs etc. Each plant gives off oxygen and water vapor and that vapor collectively produces the humidity that makes life easier for all the trees. Extensive forests modify the climate to make it healthier for all the plants in the forest. Continuous old growth forest also provide the ecosystem services necessary for many species of plants and animals, such as birds that contribute to the health of the forest by consuming many harmful insects, disperse seeds over a wide area and drop them covered with fertilizer that aids their survival.

<sup>1</sup> *The Hidden Half of Nature* page 89

<sup>2</sup> *The Hidden Life of TREES* by Peter Wohlleben inside cover.

<sup>3</sup> A. Casselman. “Strange but true: The largest organism on earths a fungus” *Scientific American*, October 4, 2007.

## Happy 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary at St. James', Newton Lews!



On December 8, 2019, we celebrated twenty years of *Newtron, the Atomic Organist*, as Music Director at St. James'. He's more than a music director—he's also our Rental Manager (bringing income from rentals and offering meeting space to local outreach organizations) and good friend.

Thank you, Newton!



## More Photos from December, 2019



December 20, 2019: Sampson Annan and Rev. Meredith, delivering gifts from St. James' to students at the Bishop Walker School



St. James' youth making blankets for Project Linus



## News from St. James' Children's School

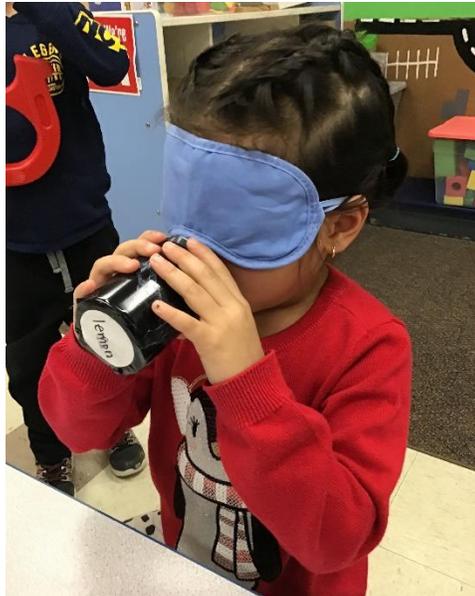
### Classroom Spotlight: The Fours Room

By Jenny Mena Zapata

Happy 2020!

For the start of the new year, the Fours are excited to learn about the Winter season and how the change in temperature affects the five senses of their bodies.

One really helpful approach is to create a five senses obstacles course! Obstacle courses are the best way to learn while moving quickly and engaging tons of gross and fine motor skills.



Each of the five senses have a station where the students move through and accomplish tasks. For instance, the hearing station would have an activity where one child is blindfolded and follows another child's voice to know which direction to move. Likewise, a touch station would include feeling a variety of textures and trying to guess what the object could be. Some stations would be completely independent so that the students can take learning into their own hands.

This sense of autonomy is important in this classroom and at this age because it allows the child to be in an ongoing conversation, full of actions and reactions with the world around them.

Using the five senses obstacle course, the Fours have a great opportunity to learn the necessary information about their own senses while reinforcing concepts, such as recognizing their own names and their friends' names or being able to cut with scissors over a variety of lines.

Over the course of the year, our students improve their fine motor skills by using pencils and crayons to complete their *Handwriting Without Tears* booklets and various art projects. Additionally, they continually practice gross motor skills like catching a ball with two hands in order that the whole body becomes tuned in with learning.

## Calendar of Events

**Wednesdays 6:30 a.m.:** Men's Prayer Breakfast

**Thursdays 10:00 a.m.** Rector's Bible Study

Jan. 12, Su: Youth Group at St. Francis

Jan. 15, W: Deadline to RSVP for Revival Bus; Visit to Potomac Valley Nursing Home

Jan. 19, Su: Mental Health worship service, Lunch, and mental health presentations

Youth Group Dinner Out, Cabin John

Jan. 21, Tu: Vestry Meeting

Jan. 26, Su: More Jesus, More Love Revival; St. James' Book Club; Youth Ice Skating, Rockville Town Ctr.

Jan. 28, Tu: Newsletter submission deadline, February 6 issue of *The Pilgrim*

Feb. 4, Tu: Lunch and Learn

Feb. 5, W: Visit to Manor Care Nursing Home



The Rev. Todd Thomas, December 15, 2019