



SOUNDINGS

The Newsletter of Saint John's Episcopal Parish, Hagerstown, Maryland

December 2018

RECTOR RAMBLINGS ON . . . THE WAR ON CHRISTMAS

And so it begins.

We can't say Merry Christmas now we have to say Happy Holidays. If you don't like our "customs" and it offends you so much then LEAVE . . . etc. etc. etc.

The above quote is only a small part of a larger rant making the rounds on social media this year. As it did last year. And as it did the year before that. And before that. And before that for however many Christmases we've had social media. It goes back long before Facebook, Twitter, and Snapchat to when prominent televangelists bemoaned and warned of the "war on Christmas."

I'm not sure what this particular rant is supposed to accomplish other than to sow discord between and contempt for people not like us. It also appears to be focused on re-exerting power of the dominant culture over minorities due to some vague perceived threat to "our way of life."

So, just for fun, I want to examine this particular "attack on Christmas" rant.

1. We can't say Merry Christmas.

This is patently false. Nobody has been banned from saying, "Merry Christmas." Target advertises Christmas wreaths and garlands, Christmas trees and ornaments, Christmas stockings, and they even have a Christmas countdown calendar which they label as an Advent calendar. Walmart, ShopKo, Macys, and JC Penney all have a wide Christmas selection, some even having to do with the actual event. So, no, nobody is being banned from saying, "Merry Christmas."

What has happened is that stores have noticed, and clerks have been instructed to say, “Happy Holidays.” And that brings me to the next point of this rant, that...

2. ...now we “have” to say, “Happy Holidays.”

One little piece of irony here . . . this rant appeared in my media feed about two weeks before Thanksgiving. Why are we so concerned with saying, “Merry Christmas” before Thanksgiving? Christmas doesn’t even begin until December 25. So it’s perfectly acceptable to wish someone “Happy Holidays” when we’re in the midst of the holiday season.

That holiday season, if you’re paying attention, has eight major holidays between Thanksgiving and January 6: Thanksgiving, Advent, Hanukkah, St. Nicholas, Christmas, Kwanzaa, New Year’s, and Epiphany. You can also find more if you do a little digging and get creative. I won’t even mention (by mentioning it) that some stores had Christmas trees and decorations out before Halloween.

If you’re so worried about not being able to say, “Merry Christmas” in late October/early November, try saying it on January 4 to someone. That will get their attention.

As I pointed out, what has happened is that companies have noticed, and clerks have been instructed, to say, “Happy Holidays,” because you generally can’t tell a Muslim from a Jew from a Christian from a pagan from an atheist from a Jehovah’s Witness. But we all generally celebrate a holiday in there somewhere (with the exception of the JW’s). People celebrate a variety of holidays this time of year, not just Christmas. Saying, “Happy Holidays” is a recognition that there’s more than one out there.

And why is it that people seem to get their knickers in a knot about this whole Merry Christmas thing, but not about other times of the year? Where’s the outrage over not being able to say, “Happy Epiphany,” or, “Blessed Ascension,” or, “Fabulous Pentecost,” or, “Merry All Saints?” What this seems to be is yet another reason to play into a faux persecution complex.

3. If you don’t like our “customs”

Let’s talk about Christmas customs. Up until the mid-1800’s in this country Christmas was basically an, “eh, whatever,” day. Some people celebrated it. Some ignored it. Calvinists banned it. It pulled from various European traditions. It didn’t become a federal holiday until 1870. So which one of these customs is it we are following? Or is it simply the custom of commercialization and economics in which we overspend on things we don’t really need?

The Christmas season, remember, begins on December 25 and ends on January 5, with Epiphany following on January 6. But it seems we have a custom of putting up Christmas decorations in early November (or now, October) and taking them down on December 26 or 27. Try purchasing a Christmas tree during the actual Christmas season. Or call your favorite radio station and request a Christmas song on December 30. I'm reminded of the Charlie Brown Easter special, "It's the Easter Beagle, Charlie Brown," where the kids go shopping for Easter supplies only to be confronted with a banner that reads: SALE: Only 246 days until Christmas.

So again, what customs are you upset that we aren't following?

4. Then LEAVE

It might be this last one that is most distressing. We live in a country made up of many different people from many different countries with many different religions/faiths/beliefs and many different customs. As much as some people want to believe it, we are not a people of homogeneous beliefs and customs. And this final statement of this rant comes across as petty, at best, or abusive, at worst. Petty because it makes it appear that we aren't interested in other people's customs or how they may feel at this time of year. Abusive because, deep down, we know that the vast majority of people don't have the resources to simply pack up and move; that they are, in effect, tied to this country as much as we are. Abusers will use the same tactic ("Where else are you going to go?") in an effort to create guilt and shift the blame for the problem from themselves to others.

So the next time someone wishes you "Happy Holidays," be pleasant. Maybe ask them which holiday they celebrate and wish them a Happy One of Those. Follow in the footsteps of the Grinch when he realized that Christmas comes without ribbons, tags, packages, boxes, or bags. Let us remember that Christmas is, first and foremost, a Christian celebration of a holy birth and has nothing to do with who says what. And let us also remember that reflecting the light of Christ in this darkened world has more to do with loving our neighbors and respecting their dignity than it does with demanding people respond a certain way because you say so.

Have a Merry Christmas, and pay more attention to the baby in the manger than to the Belk in the mall.

Blessings,

Todd+

We are a Generous People

The primary motivation for stewardship being gratitude, thank you for responding so generously to the 2018 financial campaign. Your act by returning a pledge, regardless of amount, declares

... we believe in the work of Christ's church and mission in the world;

... we believe our gifts can make a difference;

... our commitment to St. John's and the people with whom we work and worship;

... you can count on our support through our prayers and our gifts.

To those who have not as yet returned your "expected giving" for 2019 by way of pledge card, we ask, please do so. Stewardship cards are available in the office, back of the church, and at the Antietam Street entrance.

Who we are and what we do at St. John's depends on the declared generosity of all.

Fred Wright, for the Stewardship Commission

Thank You

Active Shooter Preparedness

In light of the horrific shootings in our country recently, we ask: what can we do to protect ourselves from such an event at church? There are many aspects to consider, but to begin with, the following are three basic steps:

1. **Run** - learn where the exits are
2. **Hide** - out of sight of the shooter and silence cell phones
3. **Fight** - as last resort.

More information and preparedness plans are being discussed. If you have any helpful suggestions, please contact Father Todd at (301)733-2560.

Please take the time to view this very illustrative video of actions to take when an active shooter presents himself:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DFQ-oxhdFjE&feature=youtu.be>

or Google “surviving an active shooter” and watch the video titled “**What Would You do?**” Surviving an active shooter – LA county Sheriff

Vestry Nominations for 2019

Have you ever thought about becoming a Vestry member? Or would you like to be part of the committee that nominates new Vestry members?

What is the Vestry? In short, the Vestry is a vital part of the church. It helps define and articulate the mission of the congregation. Vestry members are part of the church’s governing board and so manage the church’s resources and finances. They are accountable to its parishioners, to its rector, to the diocese, and to God (not necessarily in that order).

Now is the time to begin thinking about selecting new members. If you are interested in either becoming a member of the Vestry or participating in the member selection process, please contact Father Todd (301-733-2560) or Senior Warden, Lou Lamb (301-437-5704).

Bishop Chilton Knudsen's Farewell Celebration

As many of you know, Bp. Chilton is retiring at the end of the year as Maryland's assistant bishop.

In thanksgiving for her time in Maryland, and to offer a proper farewell, there will be a service of Evensong on Sunday, December 16, 2018, at 5 pm, and churches have been asked to bring their banner, stand, and banner bearer to participate in the service.

Clergy are expected to be ready at 4:30, and banners will need to be lined up by 4:45.

I would expect this to be a very well-attended service, so I'm planning on leaving here about 1:00 to get a decent parking place. If any of you would like to go and/or be part of a carpool, please contact the office at 301-733-2560 by December 12 so we can get organized.

Thank you,

Todd+

Give While You Christmas Shop

If you use Amazon currently to shop, AmazonSmile is a simple, safe, and automatic way to support St. John's. Go to www.smile.amazon.com and log in with your Amazon.com account or sign up. Go to your account > select/change your charity. Search *St. Johns Parish Episcopal*, and choose us as your charity. Bookmark the page and use it every time you shop!



Music Notes

A Big Thank You

Many thanks to the Parish Life Commission for coordinating the beautiful reception following Evensong on November 4. Thanks also to everyone who provided food for the reception.

December Music Ministry Highlights at Saint John's

- Sunday, December 23 at 10:15 a.m. – Canterbury and Parish Choirs singing at the Advent Lessons and Carols
- Monday, December 24 at 6:30 p.m. – Saint Francis and Canterbury Choirs
- Monday, December 24 at 10:30 p.m. – Parish Choir, strings, congregational carols (Prelude to the 11:00 p.m. Festival Eucharist)
- Tuesday, December 25 at 9:00 a.m. – Christmas Day Eucharist with congregational carols
- Sunday, December 30 at 8:00 and 10:15 a.m. – Christmas Lessons and Carols

Other Lessons and Carols in Washington County

- Sunday, December 2 at 5:00 p.m. – Saint Thomas' Episcopal Church, Hancock
- Sunday, December 9 at 9:00 a.m. and 11:00 a.m. – Saint Mark's Episcopal Church, Lappans
- Saturday, December 15 and Sunday, December 16 at 8:00 p.m. – Saint James School, Hagerstown

Community Christmas Concert

The local Cumberland Valley Chapter of the American Guild of Organists (AGO), will sponsor a Christmas concert for the community on Sunday, December 2 at 4:00 p.m. Area musicians including Mark King will participate. The event will take place at St. John's Lutheran Church, Hagerstown. The concert is free and the public is invited to attend.

December Carillon Concerts at Mercersburg Academy

- December 2 at 2:00 p.m. as part of Mercersburg Community Chorus Concert – Jim Brinson
- December 9 at 3:00 p.m. – Jim Brinson
- December 16 at 3:00 and 6:30 p.m. as part of the Candlelight Service – Jim Brinson
- December 24 at 12 midnight – John Widmann (Frederick, MD)

Saint John's Shelter

Christmas is coming and Saint John's Shelter will once again be collecting donations to give the families at the shelter a gift card from Wal-Mart, cookies, fruit and candy. If you would like to donate please make checks payable to Saint John's Shelter noting in the memo section "Christmas". Give checks or money to Bill Soulis or Ann Chaney by December 16th. Thank you!

Saint John's Shelter Board

Weekly Prayer List

The prayer list in the bulletin provides names of those in our parish community as well as friends and family that need our prayers. Names added or removed from the prayer list may be received by prayer cards available in the pew racks, email to the church office at secretary.stjohns@myactv.net, or by calling the office at 301-733-2560. Please remember to include the following information when requesting to add someone to the prayer list:

- Member of our parish OR family/friend
- Long Term (will remain on the prayer list until contacted otherwise) OR
- Short Term (will remain on the list for 6 weeks and then removed)
- Add to Daughters of the King confidential prayer list
- Needs to speak with Father Todd
- Needs Lay Eucharist Visitor to bring communion



Art and Crafts Fundraiser - Success and Appreciation

Our first arts and crafts fundraiser was a wonderful success! Many thanks go to our very own parish artisans for donating their handmade arts and crafts for this three-Sunday event. Many thanks also to our parishioners who purchased so many of the items.

The purpose of this fundraiser was to donate all the proceeds to the St. John's general operating account. We earned over \$2,300! What a good example of our generous parish.

This was a win-win for St. Johns. Not only did our artisans through their love and devotion to the mission of our church give of their time and talents, but those who purchased art and craft objects also gave much for the benefit of St. John's.

Special thanks and appreciation go to our artisans: Terry Lamb, Bob and Jill Speelman, Dusty Graham, Rebecca Connor, Ellen Collins, Mary Lou Brooks, Jane Rozes, and Judy Myers (and Lou Lamb, organizer) for making all this possible!

Seeking Spiritual Depth

On November 18, The Right Reverend Chilton Knudsen officiated at our Service of Confirmation and Reception. It was a wonderful and spiritual service, and Bishop Knudsen radiated God's love.

Prior to the service, the Bishop met with the Vestry. One topic of our all-too short discussion was how to find deeper personal spirituality. It is something that each of us can do. Some ways, of course, are through prayer, worship, learning, reading, practice, and even rest. Bishop Knudsen suggested one source for more ideas in this pursuit is the Episcopal Church website (Episcopalchurch.org). Click on "Depth" and then "Way of Love".

So, if we desire to make the personal journey to find greater spiritual depth and understanding, all we need to do is reach out – it's there: in our services, liturgy, music, and each other. We can also reach inside ourselves in quiet ways to study and hear God's words of love and comfort.

*Blessings,
Lou Lamb, Senior Warden*

Bester Boxes

The Christmas boxes for Bester school are here. About 60 of the 76 boxes have been collected already and all of the shoeboxes are due back by December 9. That is the same day as the Saint Nicholas Faire. Thank you for all of your Santa Claus help.

Florence Forbes, Karla Davis, and Lou Lamb

REACH Shelter Week Update

Sign ups have started for the Reach Cold Weather Shelter week Feb 10-16th. 4 of 7 meals have been signed up which is awesome. Lots of openings for our week, I will be at the Antietam St entrance after services or you can call or e-mail me. Missy McCray 717-420-7118 nmmjj101119@gmail.com.

FINALLY!! The Christmas Boutique is Here!!

For the next three Sundays, the 2nd, the 9th, and the 16th, the Christmas Boutique will be open for business after the 8 AM and 10:15 AM services. As in years past all proceeds go to the Y2A (Youth to Adult) group to support their ministry activities. The kids are helping set up the Boutique and will be receiving payment for the treasures you decide to take home.

A number of homemade crafts will be available (lavender sachets, baskets, infinity scarves, kitchen items), in addition to the generous donations from the congregation, to make this another successful fund raiser for Y2A. There might even be some home baked bread loaves of various different flavors: coconut, herb, garlic, cardamom, even chocolate!

If you still have items hanging around to donate, please feel free to bring them in either during the week or on Sundays. We are always looking for re-giftable items such as collectibles, jewelry, arts and crafts items, scarves, trendy hats, needlework, games, etc., which need to be in good condition and clean. So come and see, and support our kids! And THANK YOU!



What's Cookin' for Christmas at the Community Cafe??

Allegheny Power has donated reusable shopping bags and LED light bulbs with information about conserving energy and saving money. They have also included information about how to get assistance with power costs.

We would like to add some grocery items to fill the bag. If you would like to help fill a bag they will be in Trimble Hall on the table under the Service & Outreach Bulletin Board. Please sign the sheet with contact information and how many bags you are taking.

For the next two weeks if you add one item each day you can fill a bag and lighten the load for one of our neighbors! On **December 16th** bring the bag to church with you and leave in Trimble Hall.

- Dec. 1 Box of Cereal
- Dec. 2 Peanut Butter
- Dec. 3 Boxed Potatoes (your choice, mashed, scalloped etc.)
- Dec. 4 Can of Fruit
- Dec. 5 Can of Tuna
- Dec. 6 Macaroni & Cheese
- Dec. 7 Dessert Mix
- Dec. 8 Canned vegetable
- Dec. 9 Jar of applesauce
- Dec. 10 Box of crackers
- Dec. 11 Package of pasta
- Dec. 12 Spaghetti sauce
- Dec. 13 Can of chicken noodle soup
- Dec. 14 Can of tomato soup
- Dec. 15 Package of oatmeal



HAPPY BIRTHDAY



Jeremiah Laguerre	12/1	Morgan Ashbaugh	12/18
Joshua Laguerre	12/1	Phyllis Beard	12/20
Martin Price	12/2	Sarah Perryman	12/20
Shirley Chilcote	12/5	William Abeles III	12/21
Joan Kuiken	12/6	Missy Mccray	12/22
Stacey Abeles	12/7	Clayton Burkholder	12/23
Virginia Dow	12/7	Nicholas Creedon	12/27
Julie Creedon	12/8	Kevin Abeles	12/30
Lois Whisner	12/10	Ellen Collins	12/31
Patty Randall	12/16		

Happy Anniversary!

William & Florence Forbes	12/10
John & Joyce Chabot	12/13
James Ide & Donald Sachs	12/19
John & Ruth Cozzoli	12/20
Lee & Gerrie Mangum	12/27

Christmas Memorial Gifts

- For Christmas Flowers, Special Music, Holiday Offering and Episcopal Relief and Development -
If you wish to give a Memorial Gift or an Offering of Thanksgiving,
please fill out this form and send it with your check to:

Saint John's Parish, 101 S. Prospect Street, Hagerstown, MD 21740

Please make checks payable to Saint John's Parish

Flowers: \$ _____ Special Music: \$ _____ Holiday Offering \$ _____

Episcopal Relief and Development: \$ _____ **Total:** \$ _____

Please **print** the following information:

In Memory of: _____

In Thanksgiving for: _____

Donor(s): _____

Donors will be included in the Christmas Bulletin unless requested otherwise. Gifts **MUST** be received by **noon** on **December 17, 2018** to have names included in the Christmas Bulletin.