

ACTS of



DECEMBER 2022—JANUARY 2023

Blessing Our Bodies



Jessica Hitchcock

I went on a cruise in 2018 with some family members and to protect the spirits of the youngest members of our traveling party, I told everyone: Eat all you want on that buffet line or try to exercise some restraint - but if you say “I’m getting so fat” or “I’m gaining so much weight” or “I’m gonna pay for this when I get home” you have to buy me a pina colada. Every time. I don’t know whether it is part of American culture or being human or what - but we can be awfully mean to our bodies, and while I can’t protect the younger ones forever, I can try to postpone them learning to hate and punish their bodies for as long as possible.

I have heard from many of you - of all ages - that we are emerging from the pandemic with bodies that are different than they were before. I am - not at all - a scientist. I don’t know if our bodies actually got a little stiffer or if the chemistry that exists inside our bodies ACTUALLY changed. That doesn’t really matter for my purposes. What matters is that many of us feel like our bodies changed in ways that we are finding hard to live with and come to terms with.

And then I happened upon an Advent devotional series from Illustrated Ministry called ***Now in Flesh Appearing***. I saw a graphic that said:

When he lived on earth, Jesus felt overstimulated, wiggly, sunburnt, itchy, hungry, thirsty, tired. Whenever it feels hard to live in a body, we can have hope because God knows what it’s like to have a body just like ours.

Historically, Christians have often treated the body as though it is bad; a prison for our souls which long for and reach out toward God’s holiness. I think the incarnation, God becoming flesh and dwelling among, in a body limited and fragile just like ours are - is a blessing. If a body is good enough for God, it is good enough for us. Trinity Episcopal Cathedral’s Advent podcast series is called “Advent for Every Body”, and it explores all the ways in which human bodies have and continue to bear God in our world. I listened to the one for Advent 2 by my friend Allison Sandlin Liles in which she explores the connection between Advent and her journey with Generalized Anxiety. It was amazing and so fruitful for me to listen to!

This ACTS newsletter - the December and January edition - spans TWO New Years: the church’s new year, which began on Advent 1, and the calendar’s new year which begins on January 1. Maybe

(Our Bodies continued on page 4)



DECEMBER

December Birthdays

Larry Legates	2	Tom Canick	19
Movita Hercules	3	Mary Dufour	23
Michele Greco	6	Oliver Stewart	24
Anna Votaw	7	Diane Fox	26
Carol Grattan	8	Jim Marks	26
Maggie Pearson	9	Leslyn Thorne	26
Bill Casson	10	Andi Pringle	27
Ken Swab	12	Dan Eberly	27
Natalie Bergeron	15	Daphne Legates	27
Vonda O'Sullivan	15	Nathan Henemyre	28
Stewart Rouleau	16	Rebecca Huckabay	28
John Elsbree	18	Lisa Secrest	29
Miranda Marks	18	Erica James	30

December Special Dates

3	Josephine Sherfy Funeral
11	ERD Celebration
	Family Fun Day
18	Hanukkah begins
24	Christmas Eve Services
25	Christmas Day (no services)
26	Kwanzaa begins
26-30	Office Closed
31	New Year's Eve



JANUARY

January Birthdays

Alexa Pilone	2	Angie Wilkinson	17
Tony Rothwell	2	Michelle Bales	18
Cliff Johnson	3	Phoenix Matuszek	22
Jane Reaves	5	Ann Holman	23
Oliver Bergeron	8	Bill Nellist	23
Jackie Shipp	11	Jarod D'Agostino	23
Kathleen Hall	11	Mike Bernier	28
Sharon Murphy	11	Mira Ray	28
Jim McNamara	13	Eric Voit	31
Michel Ellert-Beck	14		
Elizabeth Tinling	15		

January Special Dates

1	New Year's Day
2	Office Closed
3	Book Lovers (Zoom)
6	Epiphany
8	Family Fun Day
10	Lunch & Conversation
16	MLK, Jr. Day (Office Closed)
19	Katie Beth Miksa's ordination
22	St. Luke's Ministry Celebration

SENIOR WARDEN

Thinking about St. Luke's



Deb Marks

Did you know that past issues of *ACTS* are available online? You can access them by going to the St. Luke's website (stlukesbethesda.org), clicking the top left "Welcome" drop-down box, selecting "Newsletter," and *Voila!* I have used archived *ACTS* issues to confirm when previous church events occurred, to check the date of someone's birthday, or to replicate announcement details for an annual event.

Today, I read the December/January articles submitted by past Wardens. As this is the edition that combines the end of one year and the start of the next, the messages have elements of reflection, and of hope.

In some ways, it's almost bittersweet to reflect back on last Christmas. We were so hopeful that this would be our "back to normal" Christmas. On December 24th, I started receiving anxious, apologetic messages from parishioners who didn't feel comfortable reading in-person, as the new COVID strain surged. Jessica, in her typically flexible style, set up the television in the Sanctuary, and readers quickly recorded and sent in videos. Once again, we adapted and celebrated together at church and at home. This willingness to adapt, with a determination to celebrate, feeds my sense of hope for St. Luke's.

December/January *ACTS* issues also typically contain some mention of Annual Giving, or pledging. Reflecting on past years, the early stages of our pledge campaigns are hopeful. This year is the same. Despite current challenges, St. Luke's has benefited from skilled and conscientious care of past resources, enabling us to start on a firm footing. Jessica is open and forward looking, preparing the Finance Ministry and Vestry to explore additional income sources. And of course, we all continue to bless each other by being generous with our time, talent, and treasure.

While we remain hopeful—willing to adapt and determined to celebrate—there is still a *je ne sais quoi* sense of...fatigue?...anxiety? My own sense is one of disconnect, between wanting things to be normal, and trying to determine what normal means now. In David Ford's book, *Theology: A Very Short Introduction*, Ford summarizes his experience of participating in a multi-faith event. While the setting is different, Ford's discernment of "the unfamiliar" is applicable. He states that the more challenging an issue, the more important it is to think through it in a fresh way, and that openness to surprise can bring unforeseeable results.

Upon reflection, perhaps "normal" is the wrong focus, a decoy. Perhaps we're not really looking for what's normal, but looking for assurance that God is with us. I pray that we will remain hopeful and open to surprise, and that God will lead us to think and look in fresh ways.

Deb Marks

SAVE THE DATE!

Celebration of St. Luke's Ministries
after both services on Sunday, January 22nd.

PARISH

Diocesan Regional Meeting Report

Our diocesan region, Central Montgomery County, held its pre-convention meeting on October 20th. Bishop Mariann Budde expressed both concerns and enthusiasm for the state of the diocese. She noted that not all who were part of the church before the pandemic have returned. She pointed out that the stress is still there, and that since the pandemic began, 42% of people have made, or will make, a significant life transition. She emphasized that “We are there for you.”

The bishop noted that plans for congregational vitality are progressing. She will soon ordain more deacons and hopes to explore starting new faith communities and promote educational efforts. Work on the strategic plan will be extended for one additional year to accomplish these goals.

The reparations task force is looking at the work of other groups that have been through this process and have commissioned a review covering the five original churches in the diocese and their relationship with chattel slavery. The task force plans to offer a resolution to the 2023 Diocesan Convention laying out the principle that the church needs to confess its past sins and start moving to specific actions. They hope to then present the 2024 convention with a specific plan for reparations.

The bishop requested a change to the constitution regarding the election of members of the Standing Committee. Because she feels that some regions of the diocese are not represented sufficiently, she proposes that each of the eight regions elect one person (lay or clergy) to be voted on at convention. Because there will be only eight candidates, they will all be elected, and each region will have equal representation. If there is a nomination from the floor of convention, the candidate will compete with the other nominee from that region. The bishop is also proposing that deacons may serve on the Standing Committee.

The draft 2023 budget was presented. Without going into too many details, here is some of the information. Congregational giving accounts for about half the income, and the Soper fund is the other major source. The major expense is ministries (58%), followed by general administration (17%). The total budget will increase to \$4.89 from \$4.76 million if the current budget is finalized. Salaries will increase by 3.5%.

There was a breakout session to discuss “what would healing from our racist past look like.”

Jim Mills

(Our Bodies continued from page 1)

you’ve been checking out the ***Now in Flesh Appearing*** Advent devotionals - either the one for individuals or the one for families. It’s not too late to start if you want to. Or maybe December isn’t the time to add something like that in, and January - the calendar’s new year - might be a good time to check it out. But December and January are hard times for the bodies. It’s cold and dark, and harder to get outside to exercise, and exhausting to live with the push and pull of Holiday festivities and chores vs a real and deep desire to hibernate. January is a time that we often beat up on the body and try to “fix” what we think is “wrong” with it. Be gentle with your body. Make friends with it. Talk to God about it. As you lie in bed at night, thank God for the way your body helped you that day and ask God to tend to the parts of it that ache. This body is the one God gave you, to help you do the work God has given you to do and to share the love that God sends into the world through you.

Jessica

PARISH

Congratulations to The Rev. Rosa Briones, who was ordained a Vocational Deacon at Washington National Cathedral on November 12, 2022!



Following the beautiful red and gold banner of St. Luke’s Episcopal Church and accompanied by an entourage of clergy, presenters, and vesters, Rosa Briones and nine other deacon candidates expectantly processed through the expansive and radiant nave of The Washington National Cathedral on Saturday, November 12, 2022, toward the altar where they would be ordained as vocational deacons in the Episcopal Diocese of Washington.

Holy hymns lifted everyone up and off their feet. Marta Montoro carried the St. Luke’s banner, and Sandra Stewart and Christine Zakarka cheered from the front row.

The joyful service was cast in red hues as the Holy Spirit hovered. Pentecostal sounds in English and Spanish languages rang out. Most ebullient was Bishop Mariann as she beamed and grinned from ear to ear. Rosa’s husband, Juan, her son, Alexander, and her daughter, Mildred Reyes (the Missioner for Latino/Hispanic Ministries and Diocesan Initiatives) also radiated happiness as they played their parts in the service.

Rosa has now made history as one of a group of three Latino vocational deacons to be ordained in our diocese. She and her nine deacon colleagues have joined 30 other ordained deacons serving the church and communities across Montgomery, Prince George’s, St. Mary’s, and Calvert Counties, and Washington, DC. Rev. Rosa will be serving in diaconal ministry with Rev. Javier Ocampo at the Church of the Ascension in Gaithersburg. I am so proud of Rosa and grateful for this growing ministry!

While the expansion of diaconal ministry across our diocese is a recent development, isn’t a new thing in the Christian church. Diaconal ministry was first modeled by Jesus when he washed the feet of his apostles, fed thousands, healed hundreds, preached, taught, prophesied, and shepherded the poor, the oppressed, and the needy. Jesus’ mission was and is about servanthood. He says, “For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:45)

(Rosa, continued on page 6)

PARISH

(Rosa, continued from page 5)

In the beginning days of the early Christian Church, diaconal ministry was established as the apostles recognized a significant need for additional leaders in ministry. Seven people “of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom” (Acts 6:3) were selected and ordained to serve the people in the world and to assist the needs of the growing church. Deacons, described by Timothy,

must be serious, not double-tongued, not indulging in much wine, not greedy for money; they must hold fast to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. And let them first be tested; then, if they prove themselves blameless, let them serve as deacons. Women likewise must be serious, not slanderers, but temperate, faithful in all things. (1 Tim. 3:8-11).

Some early deacons include St. Stephen and St. Philip of Jerusalem, St. Phoebe of Corinth, St. Theodora of Gaul, and St. Francis of Assisi.

Today in the Episcopal church, diaconal ministry is led by ordained deacons who promise to follow and implement Christ’s gospel of hope and love in a variety of preaching, teaching, advocating, building, justice-seeking, and healing ministries to serve the great needs of our complicated world. In addition to their roles engaging the community outside the walls and doors of the church building, deacons have liturgical roles inside the church. Deacons proclaim the Gospel, invite the Confession, set the Table, occasionally preach and teach, and dismiss the congregation from the church to go out into the world in peace and love to serve Christ. Deacons lead divine offices and perform baptisms, marriages, and funerals, though without a eucharistic service.

At Rosa’s ordination we witnessed the fullness of the Holy Spirit alive here and now. Ten persons answered God’s ‘call’ to engage faithfully and deeply in ministries that will, with God’s help, transform peoples, neighborhoods, and the world from the oppression of empire, exceptionalism, and grief, to God’s world of ‘shalom’: peace, wholeness, and wellbeing for all. Hundreds of people, including the community of St. Luke’s, have prayed and supported them throughout their formation. Rosa and her nine colleagues stirred up our hearts, renewed our faith in God’s presence and love, and gave us renewed hope for the realization of God’s Kingdom on earth. Maybe some of the hundreds who have prayed for these deacons, and perhaps some of you who read this article, may feel a tug upon their spirit and wonder, could God call me to the diaconate?

Katie Beth Miksa, who responded to her own call, will be ordained to the transitional diaconate the evening of January 19th at the Washington National Cathedral. All are welcome to attend.

Lesley+

Conversation and Brown Bag Lunch

After the hustle and bustle of the holidays, join us for a quieter time for conversation and camaraderie. Members of St. Luke’s who prefer daytime social events gather in the Reaves Room for fellowship. Our next meeting will take place on **Tuesday, January 10th at 12:00**. Bring your lunch and join in the conversation. Meet others who attend different services, renew old acquaintances, or make new friends. Find out what is happening at St. Luke’s and remain connected. Long time and new members alike are invited to attend. Please contact Marie Holbrook if you have questions.

PARISH

St. Luke's Will Be Supporting Bethesda Cares in the Month of January

Bethesda Cares was founded in 1988 with the help of local churches, including St. Luke's Episcopal Church. Its mission is "to prevent, ease, and end homelessness in our community." Their support includes a daily meal program, street outreach services, supportive housing services, and an eviction prevention program.



They believe in the importance of, first, housing clients and then helping them continue on their path of life. They believe that everyone should be treated with dignity, respect, and compassion. They have successfully housed 22 clients in apartments so far in 2022. Four families were helped to avoid eviction in September and four more families in October. But Bethesda Cares' work does not stop there. Many clients will continue to need support (not just financial, but counseling) to stay in their homes.

Many homeless are still on the streets. Many live on benches, in the woods, in very cold corners of buildings. Some live in cars at night. The members of Bethesda Cares will continue to build trust and rapport with those individuals, trying to help them to eventually become housed.

John Mendez, executive director of Bethesda Cares, will be giving the sermon at St. Luke's at the 8:30 and 10 am services on **Sunday, January 29**. Be sure to join us then.

We will be collecting coats, winter hats, scarves, gloves, underpants, and especially socks at the end of December and throughout January. We also are collecting Giant and Safeway gift cards for the clients of Bethesda Cares.



A Gift Toward Christmas Greens

If you wish to make a gift toward the Christmas greening of the church, please feel welcome to use the special envelope in the pews. You may indicate whether it is a memorial or thanksgiving gift. If you prefer, you may also scan the QR code to give online. The deadline for acknowledgement in the Christmas bulletin is **Friday, December 17**.

Thank you, *The Flower Guild*

Book Lovers Meeting Change

Please note that the Book Lovers gathering via Zoom has been rescheduled for **Tuesday, January 3rd at 7:30 pm** so as not to conflict with choir rehearsal. Our very own Dr. Linda Freeman will be leading a discussion of George Eliot's *Silas Marner*.

For information about joining the Zoom meeting, or with any other questions, please contact Nancy Reding.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



Special 16-Year Celebration on Sunday, December 11!

As Advent began back in 2007, two St. Luke's youth, accompanied by some adults, decided to help people in other parts of the world. They set a modest goal of raising \$3,000 for Episcopal Relief & Development (ERD)'s Gifts for Life program, which gives sustainable gifts that positively impact people's well-being - like a goat to provide staples such as milk and cheese, clean water for a village, and vocational training. In celebrating that year's fundraising success during the Christmas pageant, the effort became known to us as "Holy Cow!" – and then grew and grew each season!



Sixteen years later, many parishioners now have a tradition of doing some Christmas shopping through Gifts for Life, and **your collective generosity has raised more than \$230,000 for ERD** programs such as climate change mitigation, disaster relief in Haiti, entrepreneurial skills for women, and recently, COVID-19 relief and humanitarian aid to Ukraine.

To mark this milestone, on Sunday, Dec. 11 we'll give thanks for ERD's work in many ways! Here's what will be happening:

- Since ERD is all over the world, we'll celebrate Christmas with a special **international brunch between services, and after 10am!** You might even have a chance to take a birthday selfie with the Holy Cow herself! Beverages and cake will be provided; watch the E-News for food sign-up opportunities.
- Josephine Hicks, ERD VP for Episcopal Church programs, joins as our guest preacher at both services!
- Following the 10am service, **2nd Sunday Family Fun Day** takes place downstairs as we welcome animals from a petting zoo, to emphasize lessons (and fun!) from the Gifts for Life Program.



To honor our beginnings, all undesignated contributions this year will go to ERD's Gifts for Life program; please stop by our table in Ludlum Hall during Sundays in Advent to learn more! The farm animal jar awaits your spare change, and we've again been blessed with matching gift opportunities. We look forward to celebrating together on December 11!

Thank you, St. Luke's, for living out your baptismal promises so faithfully for so many years!

Marta Montoro

FINANCE

FINANCE REPORT OCTOBER 2022

	2022 Budget	'22 Actual Thru Oct	% of '22 Budget *
RECEIPTS			
Offering Plate	\$ 20,000	\$ 9,693	48%
Pledge Payments	440,000	371,076	84%
Use by Outside Organizations	30,000	36,967	123%
Altar Flower Donations	4,500	2,789	62%
Miscellaneous		56	
Operating Receipts	494,500	420,581	85%
EXPENSES			
Staff Compensations	\$ 359,626	\$ 303,409	84%
Church Activities	18,750	10,202	54%
Parish Operations	109,500	70,608	64%
Community Engagement (Outreach)	22,000	17,929	81%
Diocesan Giving	52,000	43,340	83%
Operating Expenses	561,876	445,488	79%
Surplus/(Deficit)	(67,376)	(24,907)	
Additional Funding – reserves	67,376	0	
Net Revenue	\$ 0	\$ (24,907)	

ENDOWMENT FUND BALANCE

\$120,336

* YTD October = 83% of the year

Budget Analysis: Donations for Plate and Altar Flowers were less than straight-line budget projections, but Use by Outside Organizations and Pledge payments were all ahead of projections. Expenses for Staff Compensations were slightly ahead of straight-line budget projections, but Church Activities, Parish Operations, Community Engagement and Diocesan Giving were all less than or equal to projections, resulting in Net Deficit at the end of September of \$24,907.

Thank you for your continued support.

All financial obligations for the year to date have been met and bills paid.

There is a change to the reimbursement process: If you need to be reimbursed for a purchase or need the Treasurer to pay an invoice, please send an email to the office at admin@stlukesbethesda.org instead of using an orange reimbursement form. Include the receipt, the amount, and the purpose for the expense. All requests for extra money or donations by committees or church members, should have prior approval of the Vestry before solicitation.

Susan Casson, Acting Treasurer

CALENDAR

December 2022

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
27	28	29	30	1 8:00pm Women's AA Meeting	2	3 1:00pm Josephine Sherfy Memorial Service 5:00pm Talk & Pray (Zoom service) 6:30pm Cristo La Roca
4 8:30am Worship Service (in-person only) 10:00am Worship Service (in-person & Zoom) 1:00pm Dog training classes 5:00pm Cristo La Roca 8:30pm Bethesda Youth AA	5 8:00pm Men's AA Meeting	6 11:00am Staff Meeting	7 12:00pm Noonday Prayer (Zoom) 8:00pm Choir Rehearsal	8 8:00pm Women's AA Meeting	9	10 5:00pm Talk & Pray (In-person service) 6:30pm Cristo La Roca
11 8:30am Worship Service (in-person only) 9:00am ERD Celebration 10:00am Worship Service (in-person & Zoom) 11:00am Family Fun Day 4:45pm Dog training classes 5:00pm Cristo La Roca 8:30pm Bethesda Youth AA	12 7:00pm Finance Meeting 8:00pm Men's AA Meeting	13 11:00am Staff Meeting	14 12:00pm Noonday Prayer (Zoom) 3:00pm Piano Lessons 8:00pm Choir Rehearsal	15 3:00pm Piano Lessons 8:00pm Women's AA Meeting	16	17 5:00pm Talk & Pray (Zoom service) 6:30pm Cristo La Roca
18 8:30am Worship Service (in-person only) 10:00am Worship Service (in-person & Zoom) 5:00pm Cristo La Roca 8:30pm Bethesda Youth AA	19 8:00pm Men's AA Meeting	20 11:00am Staff Meeting 7:00pm Vestry Meeting	21 12:00pm Noonday Prayer (Zoom) 8:00pm Choir Rehearsal	22 8:00pm Women's AA Meeting	23	24 5:00pm Zoom & In-person Worship 9:00pm Zoom & In-person Worship
25 Christmas Day 5:00pm Cristo La Roca 8:30pm Bethesda Youth AA	26 Office Closed 8:00pm Men's AA Meeting	27 Office Closed	28 Office Closed 12:00pm Noonday Prayer (Zoom)	29 Office Closed 8:00pm Women's AA Meeting	30 Office Closed	31 5:00pm Talk & Pray (Zoom service) 6:30pm Cristo La Roca

CALENDAR

January 2023

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1 New Year's Day 8:30am Worship Service (in-person only) 10:00am Worship Service (in-person & Zoom) 5:00pm Cristo La Roca 8:30pm Bethesda Youth AA	2 New Year's holiday (Office Closed) 8:00pm Men's AA Meeting	3 11:00am Staff Meeting 7:30pm Book Lovers (Zoom)	4 12:00pm Noonday Prayer (Zoom) 8:00pm Choir Rehearsal	5 8:00pm Women's AA Meeting	6	7 5:00pm Talk & Pray (Zoom service) 6:30pm Cristo La Roca
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THE REV. JESSICA K. HITCHCOCK
Rector
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ACTS of St. Luke's
Newsletter for members and friends of St. Luke's;
published monthly, except January & August.
ACTS Deadline: 15th of the preceding month

Advent & Christmas

Dec 11 - Episcopal Relief & Development Celebration
with International Breakfast Potluck!

Dec 18 - Greening of the Church after 10 a.m. service

Dec 24 - Christmas Eve services

5 p.m. Holy Eucharist with Dramatic Retelling of the Gospel

9 p.m. Holy Eucharist with Choir and Festive Music

Dec 25 - No service at St. Luke's

11:15 a.m. Service available at the National Cathedral

Jan 1 - 10 a.m. service only