

How God Is at Work in This Place



Today is St. Michael's Day, our first patronal feast of this new era. On St. Michael's Day of 2020 and 2021 we were physically in church but nervous, restricted and expressly prohibited from singing. This year, we can raise

our voices again (and our hands!) and sing with the angels.

Celebrating this feast day ties us to our history and tradition — back to the early church, which venerated St. Michael as an angel of healing, and back to our own history. We're singing hymns beloved by our community as we celebrate the Eucharist at our church's original high altar. But this year things are different again. We're going forward and becoming, not going back to what we were.

Just as our buildings are being transformed, our community is rebuilding as well. There's fresh curiosity about how to serve our neighborhood, and how to be a force for reparations and healing. We're welcoming new people and exploring new ideas for our children and youth ministries. We're seeking deeper nourishment as we wonder together who we will become.

I'm confident that God is at work in this place. Healing means creating anew. It takes time. But God will bring us forward in grace. — Mother Kate

Doors Wide Open: To Welcome and Serve *Everyone*

Not since the Parish House was completed in 1901 has St. Michael's undertaken such a dramatic transformation. But the spiritual value of renovating our facilities is immense: to enable our church to become accessible to all so we can truly welcome and serve everyone in the parish and the community, thus fulfilling our core value "to extend God's work in this place for generations to come."

A forum last Sunday previewed the fundraising campaign to launch with the New Year, and the role that each of us — with an emphasis on each and every one of us — can play in realizing our more welcoming, more inclusive future, in Christ's name.

The campaign is called **Doors Wide Open**. The logo, designed by parishioner Gillian Okimoto, features our welcoming Amsterdam Avenue doors.

Lucy Culver and Beth Ann Day co-chair Doors Wide Open, with a steering committee that so far includes Mother Kate, John Avery, Walter Cain, Rick Hamlin, Robin Elliott, Kyle Okimoto, Peter Olberg, Gayle Robinson and Ariane van Buren.

The church has enlisted Partners for Sacred Places, a Philadelphia-based, nonsectarian and nonprofit organization that for more than 30 years has

advised houses of worship nationwide on how to realize their potential.

Beth Ann introduced our PSP consultants Bridget Fidler and Evan Bjornen, who have been quietly but thoroughly getting to know St. Michael's and its people over the past 18 months, laying the groundwork for Doors Wide Open.

Bridget, a United Church of Christ minister with more than 20 years of pastoral experience, lives on the Upper West Side. At First Church of Christ in Suffield, Conn., Bridget led a fundraising campaign that installed an elevator in her church. Evan, a Brooklyn native who lives in Park Slope, is a member of the Lafayette Avenue Presbyterian Church in Fort Greene, now amid its own fundraising campaign.

Bridget unveiled a perspective-altering statistic, based on a so-called economic halo study that reckoned St. Michael's financial impact on the community: Together the church and St. Michael's Cemetery in Queens annually generate **\$9 million** of economic impact on New York City.

The Doors Wide Open campaign is aiming to raise **\$2-plus million** for Phase I renovation —

a conservative, realistic goal to bring about an accessible campus, an elevator and, not least, remodeled bathrooms. Donors will include parishioners, the community, businesses, foundations and public agencies. Already pledges are in hand for **\$625,000**.

The forum emphasized that the campaign is separate from our 2023 pledge drive, which provides a crucial portion of the operating expenses that keep the lights on, the staff paid and the programs running.

On Sunday the last word went to Lucy. "In my heart of hearts I know we can reach our goal," she said. "At this lectern over the years I've asked y'all to do a lot of things, and one thing stands out for me about the St. Michael's community: You always come through. Doors Wide Open will enable us to do what we do today, only better and on a broader scale."

The campaign welcomes volunteers of all kinds. Task forces are forming now.



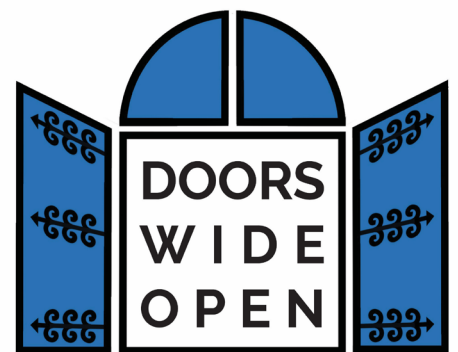
During the week the sound of the jackhammer echoes throughout the campus as workers dig out the shaft for the elevator to rise in the Parish House. Aluminum studs outline the space for new restrooms. Century-old window frames will be reclaimed. And the east garden is now a construction site that will rebloom with a ramp to the elevator.



St. Michael's is built upon the rock of ages ... and Manhattan schist.

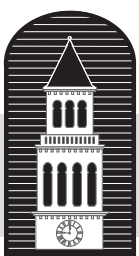


The Doors Wide Open leaders: Lucy Culver, Bridget Fidler, Mother Kate, Evan Bjornen and Beth Ann Day.



TO WELCOME AND SERVE *EVERYONE*

The Doors Wide Open logo was designed by Gillian Okimoto.



The Queen's Faith

Many have noted, perhaps to their own surprise, the impact that Queen Elizabeth II's death has had upon so many and so diverse communities throughout their own and the wider world.

People have wondered at her endurance, her common sense, her dignity and her commitment — often-tested, it must be admitted — to her imperfect family. Less often have they addressed a core and crucial ingredient of her life and personality: her Christian faith.

From my earliest memories as a youngster at the end of World War II — in church, fidgeting in my pew as the rector (who happened to be my uncle) adjured us to kneel (I thought that his message was, "Lettuce, pray!" as in "Please eat your salad.") — I remember hearing about and watching the young princess, clad in full military kit, attending to her duties.

She seemed so poised, so perfectly prepared, for the challenges that, because of the sudden death of her father, King George VI, were thrust upon her so early in her young life. And in her conversation, she would

so often, and so naturally, invoke the language of Christianity — calling on God for help, praying for God's forgiveness, wishing God's grace upon her people.

As the years went on, it became clear to me that these invocations were not, as they so often are among world leaders, the affectations of office. They were honest prayers, and they were at the core of her daily life.

In later years, as we watched her on newsreels and on TV — whether in the grandeur of Westminster Abbey or in the simple solitude of the chapel at Balmoral, most recently, seated alone in black at the funeral service for Prince Philip, her husband of seven decades — we knew we were in the presence not just of a mighty sovereign at her regal duties, but a simple woman at prayer. What we saw, and what we felt, was who she was.

Rest In peace, Ma'am. — Robin Elliott



In May, the month before her Platinum Jubilee, the Queen sat for a portrait by photographer Randal Mackechnie at Windsor Castle. The photo was released just before her funeral.

Randal Mackechnie/courtesy of Camera Press

Jesus Christ lived obscurely for most of his life, and never traveled far. He was maligned and rejected by many, though he had done no wrong. And yet, billions of people now follow his teaching and find in him the guiding light for their lives. I am one of them because Christ's example helps me see the value of doing small things with great love, whoever does them and whatever they themselves believe.

— from the Queen's Christmas broadcast, 2016

At Oberammergau, a Pilgrimage

Once a decade, the German town of Oberammergau, in the Bavarian Alps, stages what surely is the world's most famous passion play, in a vast outdoor theater. By tradition, all the performers are local villagers.

The play began in the 17th century when the town, according to lore, was miraculously saved from the plague. In response, the villagers pledged to retell the Christ story every 10 years. Our tour group was booked to go in 2020. Alas, another plague — Covid — postponed the trip.

Beforehand, I had qualms. A 5 1/2-hour spectacle (with a break for dinner), all in German? How wrong I was. The play was riveting.

Picture this: some 400 people on stage, including donkeys, camels and horses, with the scenes broken up by a 100-plus-voice chorus, and an orchestra in the pit. In response to charges of antisemitism, the script has been significantly revised — for example, emphasizing Jesus's Jewish faith. At the Last Supper, we hear him praying in Hebrew.

In earlier times, the actors had to be Catholic. No longer. This year, in fact, two key parts were filled by Muslim residents of the town.

The play runs from May through October, five days per week. On Ash Wednesday the year before, hundreds of villagers stop cutting their hair, the better to look biblical.

The play started out as an expression of faith, and that's how it moved me — reliving the sacred story as retold by ordinary people, with thousands of us in the audience sharing the journey. It was a pilgrimage for all of us, rediscovering and experiencing the life and death of our Savior.

Find out yourself — 2030 isn't so far away. — Rick Hamlin



In the Oberammergau Passion Play this year, Jesus enters Jerusalem on what we now call Palm Sunday.

Passion Play Oberammergau 2022/Birgit Gudjonsdottir

Our Historic Tie to the Russian Orthodox Diaspora

The war in Ukraine has heightened the mission of our longtime Parish House tenants the Russian Children's Studio of Language, Arts and Culture, which serves the diaspora.

THEN & NOW

St. Michael's has a history with the Russian-speaking community. From

1951 to 1965, the Parish House was home to the Russian St. Seraphim Foundation and Chapel.

Mother Julie points out that the Episcopal-Orthodox connection has always been strong.

When the St. Seraphim's congregation grew so big that they could no longer fit into our Parish

House, St. Michael's contributed to helping them buy a new permanent home at 322 W. 108th St.

Today the children and teachers of the Russian Children's Studio gather on the Parish House third floor, where the original iconostasis, a gilded screen of icons, stood as the centerpiece of worship and community.

— Jean Ballard Terepka



The St. Seraphim Foundation and Chapel iconostasis once graced the third floor of the Parish House, now home to the Russian Children's Studio.