

New York State of Mind



Jan. 19, 2025

I carry your heart with me (i carry it in my heart)
— e.e. cummings

As we wrap up our New York life, I've been taking a tour of favorite haunts. The Natural History Museum, with the enormous Alaska brown bears. The Metropolitan Museum, and the Frank Lloyd Wright room. Petqua, and Sam and Ed (where Gabriel gets treats). And the myriad paths of Riverside and Central Parks. I haven't gone to the playgrounds our kids grew out of, or the now-closed Earth Café, or the shrine at the shuttered Absolute Bagels, or Mama's Too, which has grown too popular, or all

the many places of memory here. All of that has already changed: the one constant in New York, and in life.

I know from experience that when we leave, New York will keep rolling along, oblivious to our departure. St. Michael's will go on changing too. But the memories stay in my mind and heart — just as do the faces of so many St. Michael's beloved at rest in our columbarium, and the stories of so many of you. I know this city has changed me; St. Michael's certainly has. I carry you all with me, and always will.

— Mother Kate

The Reparations Campaign Sets Up a Matching Fund

Reparations are up and running at St. Michael's. Following years of learning and discerning by the church community, on Jan. 19 the Reparations Committee began asking for donations from parishioners and friends.

The response was immediate. By Feb. 6, gifts totaled \$63,000, with \$50,000 to be matched by church funds, for a total of \$113,000, surpassing the first-year goal of \$100,000.

The work of reparations is also underway, using seed money provided last year by the church. Reparations Committee member Gregory Bryant announced that one student is already benefiting from a St. Michael's scholarship: Heather Charles, in her first year at Mercy University, pursuing a degree in nursing.

The St. Michael's scholarship, administered by Goddard-Riverside, provides \$5,000 over four years to an African-American student to pay the incidental costs of college education — such as books, school supplies and transportation.

These personal expenses often spell the difference between success and failure in college, says Bryant, who runs a pre-college academic support program for New York City high school students at Borough of Manhattan Community College.

At the annual meeting, Peter Olberg, chair of the Reparations Finance Committee, pointed out that reparations is not just about building relationships and community to heal past wrongs. "Reparations is also about money," he said.

The finance committee has set a long-term goal of \$1.1 million for the Reparations Fund, though Peter emphasized that this goal will evolve over time, and that this isn't a finite fundraising campaign that ends when it reaches a certain goal, but a permanent ministry of St. Michael's "that's part of our DNA."

The sum roughly equals the cost of two wrongs:

- The church's profit from the sale of St. Jude's Chapel to the city in 1953 — which led to the demolition of the chapel and the scattering of its congregants, who were unwelcome at St. Michael's.
- The desecration of the African Burial Ground in Harlem, where 18 members of St. Michael's households were buried. Their remains are now crushed under a city bus depot.

These are just two items in a catalogue of racial injustice at St. Michael's and in the wider Episcopal Church, going back to the slave trade in the 18th century.

The cost to repair 400 years of slavery and discrimination will never be paid in full. But those of us who have profited from white privilege can now begin this work, with our actions and our money.

Where racism was and is, let reparations begin.

— Tom Phillips

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To contribute, mail a check to the church with Reparations Fund in the memo line; or on the website, click on Donate, and in the Giving portal, drop down the menu until you see Reparations Fund.



The St. Jude's cross, dated Easter 1921, led the procession at the Absalom Jones celebration at the cathedral on Feb. 8. The cross team: Wendy Cañas, Gregory Bryant and Lynnette Holder.

How to Help the Undocumented



Beth Krause of Legal Aid

The Trump crackdown on immigration has spread alarm among undocumented immigrants and their allies. On Feb. 9, Beth Krause led a forum for a crowd of concerned fellow parishioners and neighbors.

"This is a very scary time," Beth said. "The goal was to shock, awe, terrify — and it has been achieved."

Beth serves as the supervising attorney of the Legal Aid Society's Immigrant Youth Project, which represents children and young people in Family Court, Immigration Court and before the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services agency.

Beth gave an overview of how executive orders are playing out and the response by Legal Aid and other organizations, work that's challenged by the complexity of immigration law.

We all can help, too, by letting people know their rights, being aware of vulnerable people in our communities and offering to be a contact person for the children of immigrant families.

"I think we don't lay low — we must be loud. We welcome everyone. This is not the time for people like us to be quiet."

— Lucia Moses



A primer on resources: [Legalaidsnyc.org](https://legalaidsnyc.org) and episcopalchurch.org/immigration.-action-toolkit.



A rector's responsibilities extend to all ages and stages of parishioners, including the Jan. 12 baptism of Albert Hillenbrand.

A Ministry with Prayer at the Core

Back in 2009, I first met Kate by accident at the diocesan offices, where I was working. She had just become our associate rector. At the time I wasn't physically present at our Sunday services.

When I told her that I was her parishioner, the encounter shifted focus. She wanted to know something about me, and our conversation ended with the assurance that I would be in her prayers.

Kate's pastoral presence has extended to all of us as we've experienced illness, grief, transition and celebration.

Kate supported my idea of launching a parish prayer chain. It began in 2010. I recruited other prayer ministers and, in collaboration with clergy and staff, issued a weekly prayer list — now in its nearly 800th week.

Prayer binds us to God and to one another as a congregation on a deeply personal level. Kate has always urged the congregation to deepen our prayer lives.

Prayer as a congregation lightened the darkness and eased the isolation during the pandemic. Through prayer and hard work, we've discerned new ways to welcome and serve our neighbors and the wider world — and our community continues to be transformed.

We rejoice in Kate's ministry at St. Michael's and to the diocese and give thanks for Jim, Frannie and Benji. May God bless each of them abundantly. — *Arlene Bullard*

'Desert Mother' Kate

Kate Flexer doesn't like being the center of attention. That's one of her many gifts. She's always looking out for others.

She might have remained in the city, shepherding an urban flock, but I remember her telling me about a sublime experience she had deep in the California desert many years ago. Not a soul in sight. Ah, I thought, she's a Desert Mother, like those early desert followers of Christ.

This Desert Mother has brought us so many gifts, getting us to immerse in prayer right from the start and to read the whole Bible in a year, to determine just where St. Michael's needed to go.

Kate led countless meetings, always with a light touch. She's delivered engaging sermons (West Siders, a tough crowd, listen up), peppering her wisdom with humor. All the while, she's been a mom to two talented kids and the devoted wife of gifted journalist husband Jim.

Now she's following him to California, where she'll shepherd a flock in a couldn't-be-more-unlike 99th and Amsterdam community with orange groves and golf courses. So does the Holy Spirit move. The desert and the mountains are near. — *Rick Hamlin*

Where You Enter Church Life



Our baptistry moved from east to west after Mother Kate and archivist Jeannie Terepka determined its original location by the Chapel.

THEN&NOW

Long located on the east side of the sanctuary, where it crowded musical performances, our elegant, 132-year-old baptismal font moved west during the first phase of Doors Wide Open renovations. In fact, the font was returning to its original location. When the current sanctuary was built, the third on this site, one of the two main entrances was on West 99th Street. John Punnett Peters, our sixth rector, described the font's ideal placement in his 1918 booklet, "An Explanation of the Symbolism of Church Building and Decoration, Especially St. Michael's Church." "Baptism is the door by which the Christian enters the Church," he wrote, and thus the font should be located near an entrance and a chapel designated for baptisms. The font, inscribed 1842 Laus Deo ("praise to God") 1892, is in Peters' words, "a thank offering of St. Michael's Church for fifty years of service of Thomas M. Peters, Layman, Deacon, Priest, now Rector," JPP's father.

— *Jean Ballard Terepka*



Q. What building is depicted on the back of a \$100 bill?

Test your knowledge on Saturday, March 29, at the QUIZ NITE FUNDRAISER for the St. Michael's choir tour to Ireland.

Please contact James Blue (james.blue@gmail.com) for more information.

A. Independence Hall

Where a Holy Restlessness Prevails

The seasons of the church year, the life of this parish (and her own) and the worlds beyond animate Mother Kate’s columns, subjectively excerpted here, going back to her first in September 2015, where she wrote: “The Messenger, our newsletter of storied history (founded 1894), is back — all with the hope of connecting us better, to one another and to the God who made us.”



We are midway through a fall season that’s as chaotic as it can be: a busy round of feast days and commemorations, staff comings and goings, weather that has swung from summer warmth to rain the one day we planned our outside party, and crazy election news swirling over all. In other words, it’s life as usual here on West 99th Street. *October 2024*



Let it rain: Lynnette Holder, Mother Kate, Patricia Stevens and Deborah Houston

Feel the holy restlessness God has put in us, our desire for more; for love, joy, the power of God. Name the work of God’s Spirit. God is calling! *May 2018*

Some of my favorite New York books are the Eloise books, hilarious picture books about the spoiled little girl who lives in the Plaza Hotel. Eloise is pure id, completely unfettered in doing exactly and only what she wants. From time to time in the book she announces, *Here’s what I like: ____*. And then, *Here’s what I don’t like: ____*. I love that clarity. *October 2017*

The long-expected finally came to pass this week: St. Michael’s was designated an official landmark of New York City. What does this mean? Will we be on postcards? Will we make the guidebooks? Will tour buses soon arrive in droves? Well, maybe or maybe not. But it strikes me that this church has always been a landmark. Not just because of our tower or our stone-clad “complex” of buildings, but because of the ways over the centuries that we have witnessed to and made tangible God’s love here in our neighborhood. In our music and in our teaching of children, in our exhortations and in our giving, in our feeding and in our praying, St. Michael’s has been a landmark — a cairn marking the way for travelers on the road to God. *April 2016*

Today’s gospel has Jesus sighing over Jerusalem, longing to gather all God’s people under his wings like chicks under a mother hen. “... but you were not willing,” he says (Luke 13:34). Unfair, I think. We’re willing, Jesus, we’re just so ... distracted. So much going on! How can we keep our focus when we — wait, what was I saying? *February 2016*

If I hadn’t fully realized before how important our accessibility project is, I know it now. Thank God our doors will be open, an elevator installed and our entrances ramped, only a few short months from now. *April 2023*



Mother Kate and the Rev. Sam Owen



I trekked up to the gym at Bronx Science, snapped my selfie as the technician gave me the shot, and skipped back out with glee for the subway ride home. Oh, freedom! *March 2021*

Today we celebrate the feast day of St Jude’s Chapel, torn down in 1957. The chapel’s history has become part of our St. Michael’s story. It’s a cause for repentance for past actions, when the mostly white St. Michael’s didn’t welcome the African-American and Caribbean members of St Jude’s. It’s a reminder of our heritage, honoring the legacy of life-changing ministry in this neighborhood. And it’s a challenge to action in our reparations and community outreach. We can’t change the past or reshape what was; we can’t with certainty promise right action in the future. But we can pray, and try again, and bless what good we see. *October 2023*

An early Easter means we have the full blooming of spring throughout Eastertide. Resurrection keeps happening all around us ... Throw in a solar eclipse and an earthquake, and one just might get the message that, even in New York, larger forces than us are at play. I’ve always found that time in the wilderness is good for my perspective, reminding me how small and flimsy my problems and plans are. This spring, that perspective came right into the city to pull us off our phones and look around. Did you notice? *April 2024*



Along the John Muir Trail

Change is constant. And it makes us anxious. What next? How can we know? How can we be sure? And what are we losing as we leave the past behind? At least we’re beginning to unmask and breathe more freely, with all the echoes that come from that phrase. One thing is certain: God is already there before us. The Spirit of Pentecost is change, motion, flow — everything that stirs up the stagnant status quo. Nostalgia feels good to us — but God doesn’t dwell in the past. The Spirit is always around the next corner. And always with us. *May 2021*