

A Call to Prayer and a Holy Lent



Our Ash Wednesday liturgy invites us to the observance of a holy Lent, naming spiritual disciplines — prayer, fasting, self-denial, meditation on God's word — to draw us closer to God and life's holiness.

Prayer is how we express our needs and desire for God, our deep connection to the world around us, with hope for its healing, for justice and for those we love.

There is no "how to" prescription to pray.

A prayer may be a word, a thought, a plea, a lament, a cry of outrage — or silence itself.

"I am a Prayer" is a poem by Joy Harjo, a Native American who became U.S. Poet Laureate. In it she describes the whole creation and life as praying. One line goes, "I am a prayer of sun when there is no end to night."

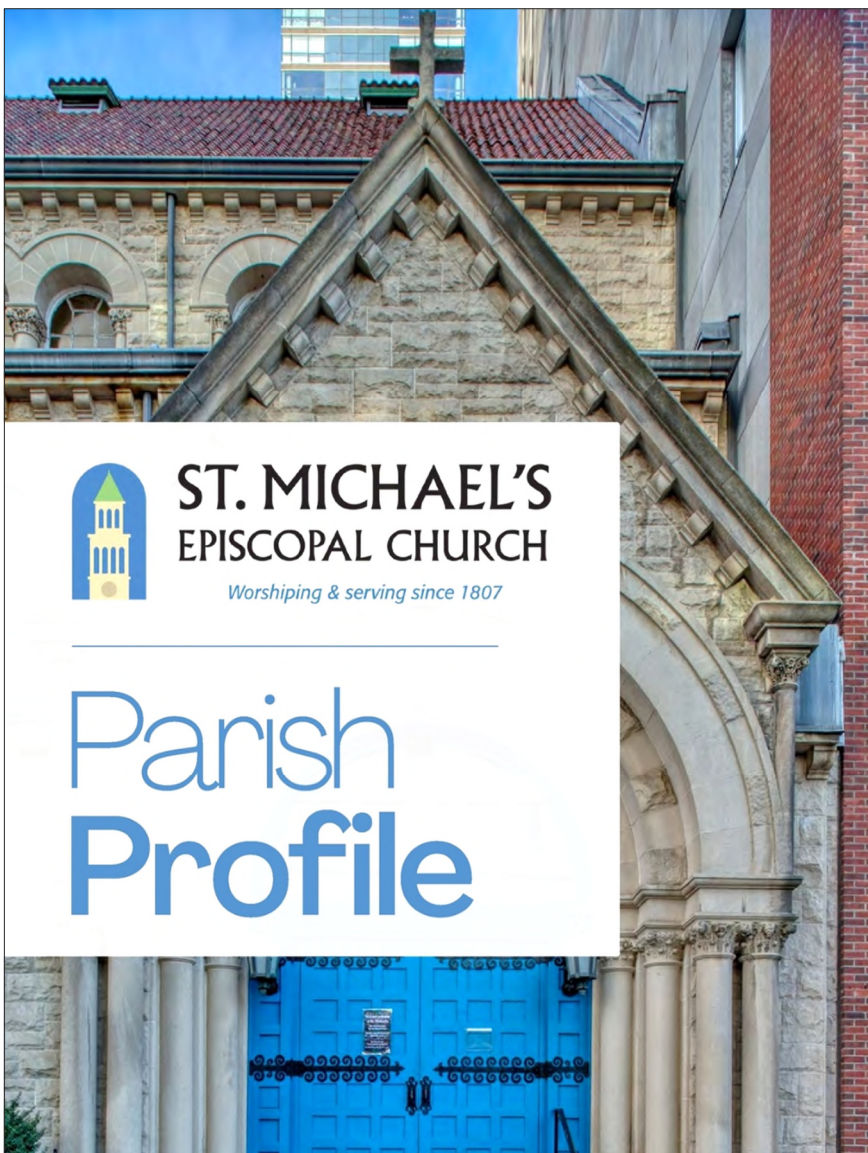
In the midst of the recent violence in Minneapolis, a local church opened its doors for prayer. Hundreds came, of all faiths, each to pray from the yearning of their own heart, for healing and peace.

A holy Lent isn't meant to be a spiritual self-improvement program (not a bad idea!), but a time set apart for reconnection and renewal, in the knowledge that our very being, made in the image of God, is itself a prayer. — *Mother Margaret*

A Prayer for Transition

O God, our refuge and strength, our ever-present help in times of change: Grant to St. Michael's an abiding sense of your guidance ... We ask this through Jesus Christ, who is the same yesterday, today and forever. Amen.

A Revelatory Portrait of the Parish



The Parish Profile is a must-read even if you aren't applying to be the next rector. (Find it on the St. Michael's website under About Us and Rector Transition.)

Comprehensive and candid, the profile reveals a parish as dynamic as the neighborhood where the church has stood for nearly 220 years; with countless blessings in people, prayer and property, from a complex of buildings in Manhattan to a 90-acre cemetery in Queens; challenges in balancing and maximizing it all; and a mission to do justice, practice kindness and walk humbly with our God — and share the Good News of Jesus Christ.

"With a wide array of ways to worship and serve, we're hungry for more," the profile introduction says. The multiphase renovation campaign puts a forward spin on the parish. The new elevator underscores how "all are welcome." The new kitchen nourishes volunteers and guests alike.

The profile reflects the contributions of the more than 100 congregants, plus staffers, who attended "listening sessions."

The Profile Committee members: Lucia Moses, vestry representative, with John Avery, Marianna Breland, Arlene Bullard, Brian Distelberg, Justin Fox, Kris Ishibashi, Beth Krause and Susan Wade.

Now the Search Committee is fielding candidate applications: Gail Naruo and James Blue, co-chairs; Jennevie Culver, Carole Everett, Ieda Fuller, Olga Hartwell, Brian Hoff, Roberta Holder-Mosley, Gregory Morris, Tom Phillips and Austin Smith.

The cross and the tower: The parish abides as a center of faith and outreach as the neighborhood changes and a new rector is soon to heed the call.



A Lenten Call to Scripture

On the first Sunday in Lent, a passage traditionally read as the Gospel is the account of Jesus's temptations. In his new book, "Everlasting Jesus: 40 Days of Timeless Wisdom for Modern Times," Rick Hamlin reflects on Matthew 4:1-11.

Scripture is this incalculable, timeless gift we've been given, an enormous boon to our faith. When we're struggling, when we're learning, when we're helping someone, when we're arguing with others or arguing with ourselves, when we're looking to grow, we have it right there, an eternal guide, chapter and verse.

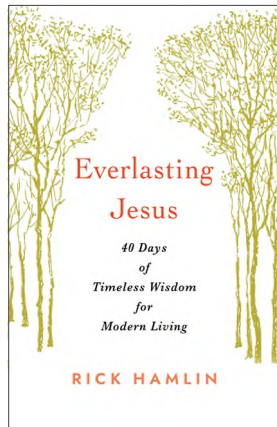
What you always get from Jesus is that Scripture is about truly living it.

Before Jesus launched what he had come to earth to do, to teach and serve, he spent 40 days and 40 nights in the wilderness, fasting.

When the devil tempts him, Jesus responds by quoting Scripture. "It is written," Jesus says, "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Deuteronomy 8:3).

The devil takes Jesus to Jerusalem and puts him on the pinnacle of the temple, the tempter making his own argument using Scripture. If Jesus is the Son of God, he should be able to throw himself down with no danger.

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After all, it is written, "He will command his angels concerning you" and "On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone," the devil quoting Psalm 91: 11-12.

Jesus comes back with more from Deuteronomy: "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test'" (Deuteronomy 6:16).

Finally, Jesus is taken to a high mountain and shown all the kingdoms of the world with their splendor. "All these will I give you, if you will fall down and worship me," says the devil. Isn't that the sort of temptation put before all of us, the

lure of money, wealth and power?

Jesus puts an end to it with one final quote. "Away with you, Satan," Jesus says, "for it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him'" (Deuteronomy 6:13). Satan leaves and the angels come and comfort Jesus, a reminder to us that Jesus is not about worldly power but something far deeper and larger.

Does evil exist in the world? Are there not devils looking to distract us and lead us astray? Indeed, there are. The Bible is a powerful ally to turn to for help. Doing so, I pray for understanding and compassion. I come to Jesus not just for words but for life. — *Rick Hamlin*

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"Away with you, Satan!" A panel by Duccio, 1308-11, from a monumental altarpiece in the Siena Cathedral. The panel is now in the Frick Collection.

We see Jesus standing on a barren mountaintop gesturing to Satan (note his wings as a fallen angel).

Satan points to one of the several walled cities below, offering Jesus dominion over them all. Amazingly, we can follow the paths and river that connect these prosperous Tuscan towns. We can enter their bolted doors and, in the city depicted in the lower right, we can enter the brick-paved square that is the center of civic activity. To any Sieneese viewer, this temptation must have registered not as a distant event but as a contemporary warning to those who served in government.

As initially conceived, the scene was even more dramatic, for the two angels waiting to minister to Jesus were added after Duccio had finished the picture. Evidently the clergy of the cathedral insisted on the angels' presence and what we might think of as the happy ending of a "reward."

Bycontrast, the artist had wanted to focus on Jesus, standing alone, like each of us, confronting the devil with no hint of reward. Try mentally eliminating those angels and you'll see how much more powerful it was, with the landscape dotted with towered towns, those emblems of domination! Truly a scene for our times! — *Keith Christiansen*

Snowmageddon's Angels



Omar Santos with two of the 70 parishioners who attended



Alex Sevillano



Raj Harold

On Sunday, Jan. 25, angels cleared the path for worshipers and neighbors. St. Michael's maintenance and security team — Omar Santos and Alex Sevillano, under the leadership of building manager Raj Harold — worked the snow blower

and shovels through a 12-hour shift and then returned the next morning, continuing until noon. "Neighbors told us that St. Michael's did the best job on the block," says Galina Koubassova, director of administration and finance.

A Homecoming in Kenya



In Kangundo, Kenya, a girls' boarding school welcomed Gretchen Pusch, Richard Bayles and Jimmy Mwaka, who worked together in 2008 to found the water project that now serves the school.

Last month, Gretchen Pusch and I traveled to Kenya and visited Kangundo, the town where I was a Peace Corps volunteer for three years, beginning in 1968. My Peace Corps training class introduced me to Kiswahili, the lingua franca of East Africa, but I learned to speak it fluently from the people of Kangundo.

In 2008, Gretchen and I helped start a water project in Kangundo to drill a well and provide clean, sweet water to 3,000 people. The project began with a conversation with townspeople about the need for water, the location of the well, the distribution system and the project's cost as well as the cost of water in the future.



At the end of the meeting, Jimmy Mwaka, the water-project chair, asked Pastor Musembi to offer a blessing. He did so, summarizing the meeting and indicating that the well's location should be on common land so that no one person could claim control. He emphasized the need to provide water without charge to the poorest members of the community.

The pastor concluded, "Then, Lord, when you come again for the second time to set the world straight, we will not be here. We will be enjoying your presence somewhere else. But, when you come to this place, you will drink water from our well."

The project has succeeded. Skilled workers drilled the well and built the storage tanks, and the community dug the trenches and laid the pipes for distribution.

Gretchen and I visit when we can and talk things over, but volunteer leadership has handled all the challenges of this community project.

When we visit, it's like going home. There are changes. Raising cows and selling milk have replaced coffee-growing as a source of cash income. People's gardens have more varied and abundant produce. New schools and houses have been built as the population has grown. Small children are less in awe of foreigners and down to age 6 are fluent in three languages: their own, which is Kikamba; Kiswahili and English.

As usual, we stopped at the home of Jimmy Mwaka. We were offered tea. First we washed our hands as water was poured over them into a basin, and we were given a fresh towel for drying.

Tea was prepared over a wood fire by boiling water, tea leaves, milk and sugar together until the leaves sink to the bottom of the pot and the tea can be poured clear. Tea is hot, creamy, sweet, smoky and tannic. It welcomes you home.

We also visited the last person whom I knew as an adult from when I lived there. She was surrounded by grandchildren and great-grandchildren. There we were given tea at a table in the front yard so that there was space for everyone.

— Richard Bayles

At the school's water-storage tank: Jimmy Mwaka, Richard Bayles, Gretchen Pusch and Robert Thyaka, current water-project chair.