November 2026

THE MESSENGER

Parish News From
St. Michael's Church
Upper West Side
New York City

The World at Its Best



"I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." (John 10:10)

Jesus' words can seem difficult to reconcile with the world around us. We see rising costs, loneliness, homelessness, illness, and uncertainty around every corner. Where, exactly, is the abundant life Jesus promised?

In her recent stewardship testimony, Arlene Bullard reflected on some of the ways St. Michael's has shown up for people in moments of joy, loss and need. She spoke of the AIDS crisis, when many who had been rejected elsewhere found acceptance, companionship, and family here. She shared how St. Michael's was there for her when she needed it most:

"St. Michael's offers us a glimpse of what the world can look like at its best."

Her words remind us that Christian abundance is not something we possess, but something we create together. It is measured not by the absence of hardship, but by the presence of God's people who help us carry it.

As we count our blessings this Thanksgiving, let us also reflect on how God is calling us to be a blessing. For the abundance Jesus promises becomes visible whenever ordinary people decide that someone else's burden is also theirs.

— Fr. Chris

What's Cooking? The New-Era Saturday Kitchen



Through the new pass-through window: Hannah Kris, Russell Sturges and Bill Thomas dish up hot meals.



Saturday Kitchen volunteers immediately took to the new facility and formed their familiar hive of efficiency.

Our new kitchen has opened. And soon a spacious new pantry will follow.

On Halloween morning, the kitchen staff did their usual heroics to deliver 300 meals to our guests, patiently waiting outside the Parish House.

Inside, volunteers thronged the newly reopened reception room. The kitchen staff can now hand trays of hot meals directly to the runners and packers, thanks to our new pass-through windows. It's all much more efficient than the old ktchen maze.

The Halloween menu: chicken chile, roasted potatoes, corn-and-squash salad and diced carrots.

Just before the guests were served, the volunteers gathered in the traditional circle.

"The kitchen passed inspection last week," Daniel Inzinga, our Saturday Kitchen manager, announced. The room erupted in cheers.

"Now we're a soup kitchen that can make soup," he added. (City code issues had shut down the old gas stove and for years the chefs used ingenious workarounds.)

"So many people have turned out to help Saturday Kitchen over the last 40-plus years," Daniel said. "Respecting our guests' dignity while giving them a decent meal is what we're about.

"Now we have a new space and new equipment. But it's the people who make Saturday Kitchen happen."

The milestone is something to cheer about! *— John Avery*

'You Fall in Love With Places When You Serve Them'

So said Mother Julie from the altar after a sustained, noisy standing ovation finally let her speak at the St. Jude's Day service on Oct. 25, her bittersweet farewell as she answers a call to be priest-in-charge at St. Mary's Ardmore, in Pennylvania.



Father Chris summoned everybody for laying-on-of-hands for Julie and prayed, "Gracious God ... we thank you for the ways you have revealed your light through her. For the compassion she has shown. The faith she has nurtured. The truth she has proclaimed. In the countless lives she has touched."

Photo: Austin Smith

The Messenger, monthly during the church year, is channeled by Rick Hamlin, Patrick Littel, Tom Phillips, John Stickney and Malcolm Sturchio, who welcome story ideas and contributions of articles, art or photos.

All in a Day's Work for a Dramaturg

Last month, in a five-day sprint, Paul Cremo attended the premieres of two operas that he, as Metropolitan Opera dramaturg and director of opera commissioning, helped bring to the stage: "The Mothers of Kherson" in Warsaw; and "Lincoln in the Bardo" at the Met.

"The title 'dramaturg' sounds like a scary fairy-tale creature," Paul says. "In fact, I'm a jack-of-all-trades who helps opera creators develop new works from conception to premiere, helping however I can."

Paul worked with composer Missy Mazzoli and librettist Royce Vavrek, who conceived the idea of turning the George Saunders novel, "Lincoln in the Bardo," into an opera.

"Lincoln" re-enacts the real-life drama of President Lincoln visiting the grave of his son Willie, who died of typhoid fever at age 11 in 1862. (The opera, anything but morbid, ultimately celebrates life.)

When the libretto was being written, Paul was at St. Michael's for a Lenten service that included the hymn, "Go to Dark Gethsemane," by James Montgomery. The lyrics reminded him of a judgment scene in the opera with a character known as the Reverend.

"I checked to be sure the hymn was written in Lincoln's time and then sent it off to librettist Royce Vavrek, who put the lyrics in the libretto for that moment," Paul says.

In the first scene of Act II, the chorus sings:

Follow to the judgment hall;
View the Lord of life arraigned;
O the worm-wood and the gall!
O the pangs His soul sustained!
Shun not suff'ring, shame, or loss;
Learn of Him to bear the cross.

The Met will premiere "The Mothers of Kherson" during the 2028 season. The opera reflects current events: The "Mothers" are the Ukrainian women on a 3,000-mile journey to rescue their children held captive by the Russians.



Photo: Karen Almond / Met Opera

In the Met's "Lincoln in the Bardo," President Lincoln communes with the spirits in a ghostly realm with an ultimately joyful message.



At the "Lincoln" premiere, Met dramaturg Paul Cremo, right, bumped into Met chorus director Tilman Michael during a buzzy intermission. "Lincoln" went on to a sold-out run.

Chris Edling, Professor and Seminarian

Our new seminarian Chris Edling's call to become a priest became a commitment in August 2024 at the Church of Saint Mary the Virgin on West 46th Street.

In his first year of internship as a seminarian, he was bringing communion into the pews for people who couldn't walk to the altar. Holding the chalice, he was overcome with emotion and started to weep, "for no reason in particular." Praying about it, he found "something in that specific act that felt like, this is the thing you're supposed to do."

Chris is a professor in NYU's Writing program while he studies for the priesthood at General Theological Seminary.

Raised in Colorado by an Italian mother, he thought he would become a Roman Catholic priest. But four years at the University of Southern California moved him in different directions. "Christianity always felt like my home," he says, but he couldn't find a church home until he moved to New York in his thirties and discovered the Episcopal Church.

His gifts to St. Michael's, he hopes, will be "prayer, preaching and pastoral care." He's also learning church administration from Father Chris.

Chris wants to talk, listen and pray with parishioners here, mostly because he sees "a lot of God in other people." He might be here only a year, so don't be shy. — *Tom Phillips*



Photo: Yunjeong McSeol

Our new seminarian Chris Edling with the Rt. Rev. Dr. Rowan Williams, former Archbishop of Canterbury, at an event at St. Edward the Martyr in Harlem on Oct. 16.

The Chapel's Mysteries, Revealed by a New Show



Photo: Brian Kutner

Chapel of the Angels, designed by Louis C. Tiffany, constructed in 1920 and now featured in the exhibit, "Designing the Gilded Age," at the Metropolitan Museum.

It could have been otherwise.

In 1918, St. Michael's commissioned Tiffany Studios to design a memorial to its church's prominent benefactor, Margaret Elizabeth Zimmerman: the Chapel of the Angels.

The chapel has provided so many of us with a special space for meditation, our thoughts guided by the visionary mosaic behind the altar.

As Jean Ballard Terepka, our church archivist, has noted, in a 1920 Messenger the Rev. John Punnett Peters — longtime rector and a noted scholar of Old Testament languages and literature — explained the idea behind the mosaic:

> *"Therein is portrayed the cloud of heavenly witnesses to the Redemption ... On high is the star, symbol of the divine presence ... Below the star, but in the midst of the universe as symbolized by the planets, two kneeling angels hold aloft the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him ... and to and through the crown to the cross on the altar beneath shine the rays of the star ... while the heavenly host marvels at and adores the divine plan by which God reveals himself in man's humility and suffering."*

Peters added, "There is a kind of spiritual mystery in the composition." An understatement!

Look closely and you'll see a shaft of light from the star "to and though the crown" down to the cross adorning the chapel altar, merging the pictorial evocation of heaven with the worshipper's meditational space.

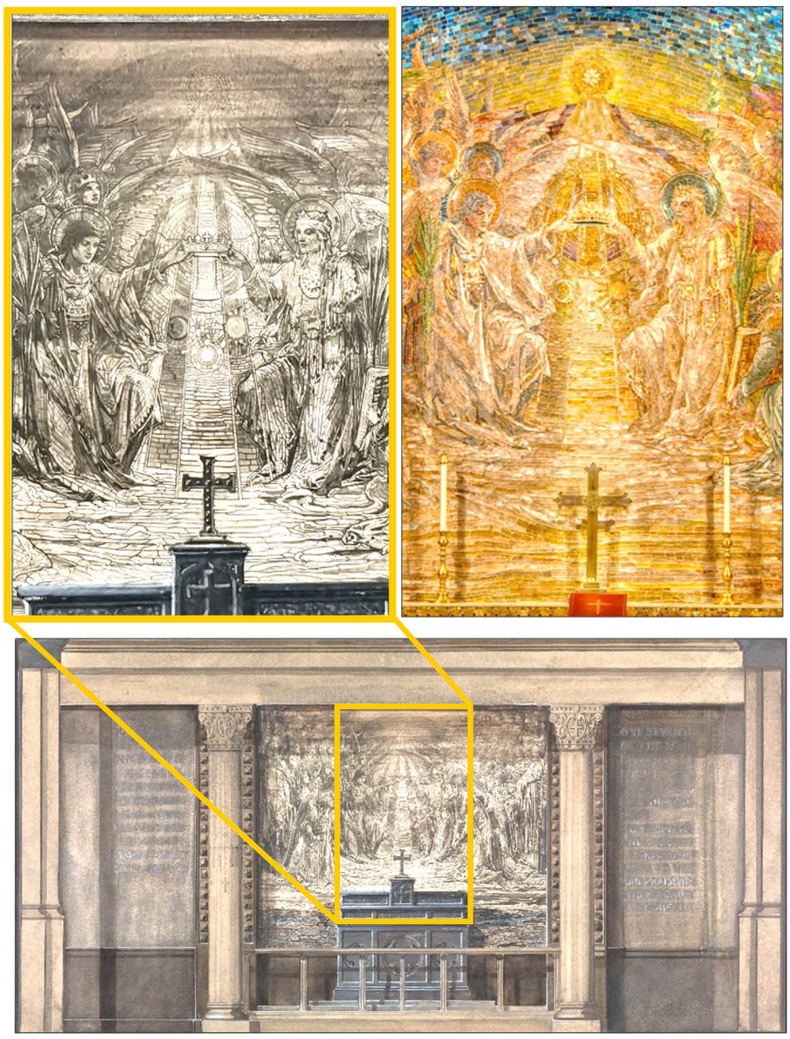


An earlier, less dramatic Tiffany design for the chapel.

The "Designing the Gilded Age" show at the Metropolitan Museum includes two Tiffany designs for the altar.

The earlier design was rejected. Lovely but rather lifeless, it incorporated two sculptural reliefs and three standing figures of angels.

The second design came to marvelous life in our chapel. Alleluia! — *Keith Christiansen*



The Metroplitan Museum exhibit features a cartoon of the chapel that includes a black-and-white photograph of the central mosaic. The detail above at left above outlines the shaft of heavenly light that leads the eye to the cross on the altar.

In the Met exhibit catalog, curator Alice Cooney Frelinghuysen writes: "The black-and-white photograph gives no indication of the splendor and glorious color of the opalescent and iridescent glass mosaic that was ultimately constructed and remains in situ."

Designs for Chapel of the Angels, St. Michael's Episcopal Church. Louis C. Tiffany. © The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

At the Metropolitan Museum

Designing the Gilded Age:
Drawings From the Studios of Louis C. Tiffany

On view through Feb. 7, 2027