

The



Rock

St. Peter's Episcopal Church

Established in 1954

December 2023

From the Pastor's Desk

Dear People of God,

I sure hope this column doesn't make me sound like Scrooge!

Perhaps you've heard there's a "war on Christmas." It's hard to know when it "started," but if you watch certain television stations or listen to certain commentators, it has been "happening" for a long time, and it "gets worse every year," and it's right about this time of the year we see its "effects." And one of the most "troubling" pieces of "evidence" of this "war on Christmas," you will likely hear, is how nowadays people not only say, but are "expected" if not "forced" to say, "**Happy Holidays**" instead of saying "**Merry Christmas**." GASP!

As most of those quotation marks in the previous paragraph imply, I don't think there's a war on Christmas at all. At least not in the way we usually hear that phrase. And, for what it's worth, I happily say "**Happy Holidays**" to people *when I don't know and am not so inconsiderate as to make assumptions about their personal religious beliefs*. That said, you won't hear me say "**Happy Holidays**" to *you*. I know you celebrate Christmas because you believe that that holiday—that *holy-day*—is the Feast of the Incarnation, the celebration of the Son of God choosing to "share our human nature" and "live and die as one of us" in order to "reconcile us" to God (BCP p. 362). To me, wishing a "**Merry Christmas**" to someone who isn't Christian makes no more sense than someone encouraging me to enjoy Eid al-Fitr, the Islamic holy day that marks the end of Ramadan. I respect that holiday. I don't

celebrate it. Why would I wish a "**Merry Christmas**" to a non-Christian?

On the other hand, maybe there *is* a "war on Christmas" after all—although I am now going to stop using that offensive phrase, with its cheap, scare-tactic metaphor that only serves to diminish the horrors of *real* wars, the kind that kill people and destroy homes and create misery, and don't just get certain self-serving pundits and politicians peeved. Let me call it instead the "secularization of Christmas" (which, I admit, doesn't quite roll off the tongue the same way). It dates back at least until 1870, when Christmas went from being "just" a religious holiday to a federal one. It certainly intensified over the course of the following century, as what was supposed to be a profound religious celebration became increasingly commercialized. It continues today in the insistence that we should say "**Merry Christmas**" to anyone and everyone, draining the phrase of meaning. As the Christmas carols started to play from the overhead speakers in the department stores a little earlier every year, and "Black Friday" (not to mention "Cyber Monday") came to stand on seemingly equal footing with other national "holidays," we were taught in countless subtle and not-so-subtle ways that the "true meaning" of Christmas was to be found not so much in how little the Christ-child had but in how much *we have*, not so much in what the Christ-child *offers*, but in what we think we *want and need*.

Actively resist, fight back against, that secularization of Christmas. It surrounds us, and it can seep into our psyches without us even realizing it. Start that resistance by



allowing Advent to be Advent, a distinct and beautiful season of the Church year when we don't bathe in Christmas lights but prepare for the coming of the

Light. Then celebrate Christmas not for what our culture tells us it's "supposed to be," but for what it is: a 12-day festive season when we revel in the gift *God* has given *us* in Jesus Christ. Be mindful and intentional in remembering that when we're giving gifts or visiting family or going to a Christmas Eve service, Christmas is really about our encounter with the *Holy* in those experiences. We are entering deeply *sacred* seasons. Embrace them as such.

You remain in my prayers. I pray you will experience a holy Advent and a joyful Christmas, and I give God constant thanks for the gifts you are.

Yours in Christ,

Fr. Dan+



Being Thankful

I am writing this in the early morning of Thanksgiving Day, my favorite holiday of the year. There is much to be thankful for.

- ❖ ***I am thankful*** that God looked after me even when I didn't really "know" God. God saved me from family dysfunction and addiction through my formative years to find love and live a peaceful, contented life.
- ❖ ***I am thankful*** that God led me to a soulmate and best friend who would build a beautiful family with me- one that would reverse the troublesome one of my past. I thank God for her, our children, and our grandchildren.
- ❖ ***I am thankful*** that God led us to the community known as St. Peter's of Eggertsville some 44 years ago. Although we have lost many friends along the way, the community Spirit remains present and strong, and the

"newer" parishioners keep it that way. I thank God for the Spirit and determination of my Christian community.

- ❖ ***I am thankful*** that God called in the marker I was given so long ago, to come and serve His church in Eggertsville, and the greater community, as a member of the Diaconate. I feel that I have informed the needs of the world to you inside our walls, and encouraged you to respond in kind outside them. I am thankful, pleased, and proud that St. Peter's has responded in splendid fashion for 17 years.
- ❖ ***I am thankful*** for all the blessings God has bestowed on me, without me even knowing about them. I just know they were there, and more to come. I am getting much better in recognizing them. Thank you God.
- ❖ ***I am thankful*** that God has allowed me to play golf with family and friends. Hey, give me a break. Even God rested on the 7th day!

Give thanks,
Deacon Tom

Diakonia Musings



As I witness the first snow on the ground and realize that winter weather is here, I marvel at how quickly the seasons change. Just as we begin to lean into the heat or the snow, the faster pace or slowing down, enjoying each time for what it offers and fully embracing it, the next season creeps in. I love the changes because I change too along with the weather. I have so much energy as I bask in the sun, full of hope. I find joy in the colors of the trees and flowers when they bloom and the smells in the air that represent each season. I feel such peace in the quiet of a starry night when there is barely a whisper because the snow covering the ground absorbs the sound.

Advent is like a mini season change when one week we focus on hope because Jesus is



coming. The next we are told to be found by Jesus enveloped in peace and then, with joy, we should



give thanks in everything. Finally, we should lovingly prepare ourselves for the coming of God, Emmanuel. Each week morphs into the next, like seasons, and we slide along from one to another in preparation of the bursting forth of pure love on Christmas Day. Then we continue our own stories as we give of ourselves on Epiphany, just as the visitors who followed the light in the sky, gave what they could to a vulnerable baby who would be the Savior of the world. What a celebration of changes!

Thank you to everyone who participated in the Racial Healing Circle. I hope you were impacted by the powerful act of sharing your stories and being heard by others. This type of event is only one tool that can be used to connect us as human beings in a beloved community. Kuddos to St. Peter's for taking a step towards building up the kingdom of God right here.

I have been collecting winter clothing and taking it to the Cathedral for their clothing give away to the homeless. If you are cleaning out closets and have gently used coats, jeans, sweatshirts, (especially larger size men's clothing), socks, hats, gloves, or blankets, I can take donations downtown for you. These donations are life savers for the families that have to wander the streets during the day because they are only allowed in shelters during the night.

I know you are all feeling like the church is asking for donations all the time, and we are, but the need is so great and we are called to give from our abundance when we can. When we do, in our own time of need, we will feel better about receiving help from others. Life is made up of both giving and receiving, times of abundance and times of scarcity. With joy and thanksgiving, let us all continue to do what we can.

Thanks for you all and Christmas Peace be with you.

Deacon Diana



Blessing Box News

Thank you, St. Peter's for your generosity this past month, your donations have been very helpful. Our neighbors continue to contribute, we find items in the box frequently.

Requests for December are:

For pets: Gallon size freezer bags to put pet food into and canned cat and dog food.

For people: Soup, chef Boyardee ravioli, beefaroni, canned tuna, or chicken.

We have found some new places to shop. The Goodness Project of WNY is a resource center serving non-for-profit organizations such as churches or schools. Tori Paradise and Alison Mohr have shopped there a couple of times and were able to purchase lots of merchandise and food for a reasonable price. The items available vary so what you may find one time might not be there the next

We continue to reach out to the community for donations of gift cards or support. Walmart, Wegmans, Tops, VFW post, and individuals have all donated gift cards or cash. The Parish Nurse ministries of New York, Inc will donate 50% of their Christmas fund raising drive to our Blessing Box. Tori Paradise has had good luck getting pet food donations. St. Peter's TGI Friday's fundraising results are \$258.43. Thank you to everyone who attended and those who made monetary donations.

We are hanging in there and continue to fill the box 3x/week. God is good!

Gary Donhauser, Alison Mohr, Tori Paradise, and Lois Tripp



Cheap Reading Material

When you go downstairs for coffee hour look for the bookcases against the wall filled with books for your reading pleasure. There are books on romance, mystery, intrigue, self-improvement etc. Pick a book or more and make a donation. You choose the donation amount. All money goes to the Pet Pantry



Empty Pop or Water Bottles

I know that most of us recycle what we can. I would imagine that you also bring your pop cans or bottles in for redemption. Did you know that we have an empty bottle and can ministry that now benefits our Blessing Box? In the undercroft there is a large shopping cart in the hallway next to the kitchen. Place all your redeemable empty cans and bottles in the cart. Gary Donhauser will take them in to the redemption center. Please consider helping the Blessing box funded by donating your empty cans and bottles. Thank you!

Gary Donhauser

End of the year approaching

2023 is drawing to a close and December is always the busiest month of the year. The Vestry is working hard on the 2024 budget and looking forward to next year's activities. I would like to thank everyone for maintaining their 2023 pledge donations and timely response to the Stewardship drive by returning their 2024 pledge cards. This information will be used to finalizing the 2024 budget.

Every year we seem to have a major project to maintain and improve St. Peter's physical plant. In 2020 the roof over the Sacristy was replaced. In 2022 the roof on the Mission House was replaced and the fire alarm system was upgraded. In 2023 the roof drain over the sacristy was replaced and the sound system and camera were upgraded. Some of this was partially supported by grants from the Diocese and the balance from your continued support. We will be exploring the possible replacement of the heating boiler. While this system is still functioning, it was installed in the mid 60's and

we believe it is better to be proactive on this as to opposed to waiting for a failure.

Again, thank you for your continued support and we are looking forward to another great year in 2024.

Ed Hill



Linen Pantry Update

Every month I say how busy we are in the Linen Pantry. This month we were exceedingly busy. We assisted 30 families from 15 different agencies.

The Dash receipts were sent in and we are waiting for a \$225 check. We will use some of the money to purchase cleaning supplies at a dollar store which are items our clients are asking for in addition to the household items we give them.

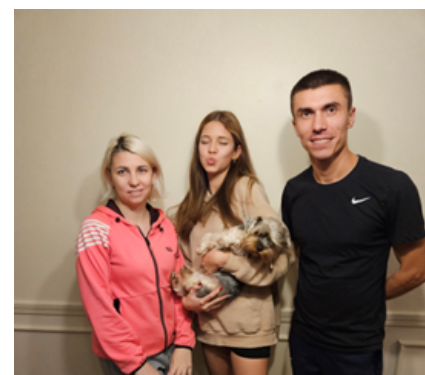
As you know cleaning supplies are expensive. If you donate cleaning supplies indicate if they are for the Blessing Box or the Linen Pantry. It doesn't matter which ministry you choose. They go to people who need them.

This month we are collecting hats, mittens, scarves and socks. An assortment of these items will be sent to the 3 Food Pantries (University, Good Shepherd and North Park). Another assortment will be sent again in February if we have enough.

Merrie Hill

Thanksgiving Food Collection

Here is a picture of the Melynchuk family we give our Thanksgiving food collection to. The Linen Pantry provided them with the necessary household goods when the family first arrived.





CHRISTMAS TIME AT ST PETER'S FRIENDSHIP BAZAAR

The Magi have seen the star rising in the East and have already set out, once more, to bring their gifts to the Christ Child. Traditions of gift-giving throughout the world are said to have grown out of this story. Somehow, Black Friday and Cyber Monday seem a long way for the caravan track that brought the Three Wise Men to the manger that first Christmas to meet the "King of Kings," a tiny newborn baby lying in a feeding trough.

We live in a modern world of instant communication, access to information and technological brilliance. It makes sense some want to give gifts that reflect these advances in enjoyment and comfort.

So, being mindful at St Peter's Bazaar of the "real reason for the Season," we have prepared some modest, handmade gift items that you can also buy for friends and loved ones that, will express the love and hope of that First Gift. All materials, both new and recycled, are donated and all proceeds go to help fund our assistance to refugees. To mention just a few items available and suggest that you check out everything during coffee hour: pocket calendars, magnetic scissor sleeves, wood tree ornaments, snowman candles, Christmas wall décor, gift baskets, gardeners and mechanics bar soap and more...



Our Buffalo Bills "Kiosk" (GO BILLS!! PLEASE!!!) also offers a number of gift items and stocking stuffers for fans of all ages including furry ones. Anyone might like serving trays for their next game day get-together, our recycled denim jeans bags with Bills fabric lining have been a hit with young ladies that we know, our chalk – magnetic board /Bills game schedule is ready to hang in kitchen or family room for viewing

and score reminders, and refrigerator magnets declare your loyalty while keeping important notices handy. Your faithful dog companion can join you in watching the Bills games wearing one of our Bills scarves.

We offer sizes S, M, L and XL and can make them to order if the size your pooch need is not available at the Kiosk.

We are always thankful for your support of this fundraising project for St Peter's refugee ministry efforts. We welcome your suggestions of inexpensive handcrafted items that you would like to see available for sale. If you enjoy crafting and/or selling, we can always use more help. Help with holiday delivery, too Please contact me at 716-908-4149.

IF YOU WORSHIP ON LINE and would like to make a purchase and have it delivered (local only and exact cash please), contact me.

Deacon Joanne

Wishing you and yours a blessed Advent and Christmas Season and a very Happy and Healthy 2024!

Your Bazaar Merchants



12/24 8:00am Church service – no music
12/24 10:00 am No Church Service
12/24 4:30 Christmas Eve Service –
with music
12/25 No Christmas Day Service

Jesus doesn't care how many bible verses you have memorized.

He cares about how you treat people.



Prayers of the People

Long Term: Jim G, Kristie P, Ron B, Gino L, Lee & Jessica M, Judy E, Joanne U, Beth, Sue & Dave S, Ron W, Lynda C, Dominic, Lindsey V, Jason, Bill, Finnegan M, Nicole, Sue H, Joyce J, Emma B, Kelly, Marilyn S, Kathy and family, Rickie P, Becky P, Giada F, Jordyn S. and Bray S, Olive P, John D and Rachel, Maria and Dick W, Jean.

Short Term: Madilyn, Sharon H, Michael Curry, Florence, Jeff W. Jan & Walter W., Eduardo, Kenny S, Scott, Bill B, Kristy G, Mike K, Dan D, Gary D, Kelly T, Carma, Anita, Tom T.

Military: Ben M, Brandon G, Richie, Quincy, John

Thanksgiving: Billy F (he was in rehab, now back at home)

Please contact me with any updates, corrections or additions,

God bless!
Sue Gunn



12/01 Andrew

Taube

120/8 Katie Hilleke

120/8 Merry

Jeffers

12/29 Riley Passariella

12/30 Diana Leiker

