



Church of the Advent

# Advent Advisor

February 2024

## God's Calls for Compassion

*The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God. (Leviticus 19:34)*

There have been recurring postings on the web about a mama bear's embrace of a man who saved her two cubs from drowning while the little family tried to cross a swollen river. It touched me as much the second time around as my initial reading of the article. I usually have a sentimental reaction to stories about God's youngest and most fragile creatures.

The story about a bear hug for the man who saved mama's cubs from drowning is a sweet story that is easy to share. The well-publicized accounts of a mother and her two children drowning in the river that separates Mexico from Texas is a bitter reminder that agendas sometimes imperil the safety of innocent persons. Regardless of the drastic need to overhaul the country's immigration system and establish humane policies to manage the influx of refugees at the Southern Border, the razor wire barrier that the Texas governor ordered installed was a terrible solution that had cruel consequences. Ruthless tactics resulted in tragedy for that little family who had made a long, dangerous trek to seek refuge in this country. They were within feet of safety when the river's currents swept them away; their rescue by US immigration officials thwarted by razor wire.

The cruel circumstances that too many people endure or succumb to are heart-wrenching. Some are too harrowing to talk about. Some are connected with issues that could ensnare us in polarizing political debate. In



with issues they oppose.

our time, politics are not part of normal discourse but have become weaponized to effectively distort, silence or perhaps crush opposing viewpoints. Choosing not to enter the fray may seem sensible, but persons with strong partisan resolve may criticize avoidance as being complicit

I wonder. Do the founding democratic principles of government by and for the people endure because citizens enter into the discourse despite the prudence of keeping one's opinions to oneself? Is it appropriate to express political leanings that may lead to arguments that become ugly? Are our politics compatible with our theology? What does separation of church and state really mean? Might such questions be God's urging our participation in conversations, particularly those pertaining to social welfare?

The gospel is social with political ramifications. I know that our immigration system is broken. I know that others share my anger about cruel policies that led to the death of a mother and her children who drowned because razor wire prevented their rescue. Their desperation and that of the poor, huddled masses seeking asylum, or at least refuge, at the Southern Border is heart-breaking.

We profess that God is love and that Jesus Christ in his life and ministry revealed the love to which God calls us. We are baptized into the life of Christ. By grace, faith grows, immersing us more and more deeply into his life and making us disciples of love. As we join with others in saying the words of the Baptismal Covenant, we renew the commitments made at baptism. That includes seeking and serving Christ in all persons, loving neighbor as self, striving for justice and peace among all people, respecting the dignity of every human being.

Compassion is not limited by the complexities and stresses of our lives that may narrow our expressions of concern to family and friends. We care about others. We wince when we know about a person being treated shabbily; no doubt hoping that people would just learn how to get along. We detest a bully's actions even as we recognize that an attempt to diminish another's worth is an acting out of emotional insecurity. In business and politics, disregard for others is not normalized – yet. However, those tempted to become power players and ignore their moral compasses in striving for success



*(Continued on page 2)*

(Continued from page 1)

may begin to crave power and become hell-bent on getting and keeping it no matter the costs to others. Power grabbing in any arena has destructive potential. In government, the impact of unrestrained ambition is broadly felt and becomes a factor in the perpetuation of systemic injustice. A small controlling faction can wield influence that has generational implications for an entire populace. The actions of persons in charge who have little regard for the welfare of others may be followed by the strivings of others who want in on the action, driven by nothing more complex than desire to be close to power or themselves have power for power's sake. Power is seductive. It can corrupt. Absolute power can corrupt absolutely.

Power is celebrated when it has been used successfully with intention to provide a helping hand or to promote the common good. Empowering a person to claim their worth, their dignity as God's own, and be able to partake of a bit of life's bounty feels good because it is good. Good is an illusion for a person enthralled with a distorted sense of superiority who acts "entitled." Political influence may be served to promote justice or be overbearing. An agenda with little regard for other's right of self-determination is typically the product of persons who operate with what they claim is political expediency in order to save society from persons whose ideologies are contrary to their own.

I have known persons so dispossessed of basic goods that what they needed most was to know that they matter. I have worked to improve the conditions for some of society's most vulnerable people. I have written and spoken what I perceived to be true, to be right, and walked alongside others calling for change. I vote and have worked on campaigns. I have attended forums and conferences and participated in group learning sessions. I have been exposed to some of the hard stuff of life, and realize what small movement I've made towards solidarity with those for whom life is really tough.

I do not know the answer to how involved God wants me to be in conversations, especially those with a mix of opinions so strong that talk may deteriorate into fierce arguments. I think that God wants me to speak honestly but with a degree of humility so that, rather

than rankling others by pressing an opinion, I will listen and help them be heard. I think that God wants my proclamation of the Good News of God in Christ to be authentically lived and spoken with conviction that

inspires others to discern how God wants them to be agents of justice and peace. Whew! Our God doesn't deal in cheap grace!

So, what do you think? Might listening and respectful, honest sharing be significant steps in a process of reconciliation that may eventually flourish among the weary peoples in in this world groaning for

release from strife, desperation and grief, and all tragic consequences of humans' disregard of the worth and dignity of others? Might we listen for the word of consolation we need to hear, consolation that the world is in God's care, and God is bringing in a kingdom populated by people who act like they believe that they and all other people are God's beloved? That is good consolation to soothe the stings of life. That is good hope, a vision of peace. So, might participating in God's great enterprise of salvation be as basic as getting to know others and forming relationships by communicating with one another?

Lent is a season of self-examination and repentance. It is a time to take on a right beginning. May an observance of a holy Lent through self-denial, prayer, meditation and discernment connect us with the living Christ. Animated by his love, so deep and so broad, may we experience his compassion as we learn stories and discover our poverty mirrored in the needs of others. May we realize kinship with all God's people, including the world's most vulnerable, and be open to where that may lead.

Connie



## Ash Wednesday Service

Lent begins on February 14 with the traditional Service of Imposition of Ashes followed by Holy Eucharist.

The service begins at 6:00 p. m.



During the service, worshippers will be invited to come forward for the Rev. Connie Connelly to use ashes to impose, or mark, the sign of the cross on their foreheads.

The use of ashes this way reminds the worshippers of their mortality and their penitence.

In practice since the ninth century, imposition of ashes recalls those times when people who repented of their sins would scatter themselves with ashes and dress in sackcloth.

It was customary in the very early Roman Catholic Church to use ashes from burning the palms blessed on Palm Sunday of the previous year.

To emphasize the austerity of the day and the coming of Lent, the altar will be bare in appearance with only a minimal of ecclesiastical appointments in use.



## Music for Lent

The Choir School and the Parish Choir will lead the service of Choral Evensong at 5:30 p. m. on February 18 at the Church of the Advent.

The Rev. Jim Horton will serve as officiant for the service.

An organ recital by Brandon Woody will also be part of the musical offering.



The choristers of the Choir School will debut their new vestments. The twelve red cassocks and white cottas of various sizes were donated by St. Michael's Episcopal Church in Barrington, Illinois. The only cost to the Church of the Advent was the shipping for \$79.30.



The choristers of the Choir School will debut their new vestments.

The twelve red cassocks and white cottas of various sizes were donated

Dear COA Parishioners and Friends,

I would like to share with you some thoughts and an invitation.

Several months ago the Pastoral Care group decided to undertake a prayer ministry, led by Jim. He collects names from the Advent

### Prayer Group



Advent Advisor prayer list and birthday list to enable us to enact intercessory prayers for those named. Also, Jim shares words of encouragement.

Those participating do so in their own time, in their own way. There is no prescribed method to follow, just the desire to do what you can, when you can. I find myself often praying during the night when having those wakeful moments; or I may pray at random moments during the day.

Lately, Jim and I have heard from several folks, thanking this group for their support. They have told us that they have felt healing, felt connection, and felt love.

From childhood, we have all been taught the power of prayer. This ministry group has allowed our individuality to meld into one prayerful mission.

All are welcomed to participate. Whether you are home bound or active, it doesn't matter. If you are interested, please contact Jim via email - jimallen1209@gmail.com.

Maria Allen



## IT'S LEAP YEAR!

## Around the Altar

As we step into the new year together, our hearts are filled with gratitude for the love and support that binds us as a community.

One of the most notable ways that we celebrate community is to provide altar flowers, usually given to God and in memory and/or honor of loved ones.

However, there has been a sharp decline in floral offerings, leaving many Sundays with no flowers for the altar. If you would like to provide altar flowers, please speak with Joe or Lori.

Thank you to Mark Curley, who has begun his service as acolyte at Church of the Advent.



Acolytes

Mark is a veteran acolyte, having served in his previous church in Virginia.

Caleb Fay and Maddie Michel are training as acolytes to join Mark in this valuable and visible ministry.

Thank you to Bill Webb and Exum Taylor for their volunteer work in training the new acolytes.



Altar Flowers

## Volunteers Pack Blessings in a Backpack

Volunteers from the Church of the Advent joined with volunteers from the First United Methodist Church during January to pack bags of weekend food for the children of Martin County as well as deliver the bags to the respective schools.



Thank you to the following who helped:

Jim Allen  
Maria Allen  
Jeanie Sessoms  
Lori Taylor  
Bobby Greene  
Janice Greene  
Connie Connelly  
Joe Jernigan  
Cathy Cohen  
Mark Curley

Marie Robertson of the First Christian Church  
Kit Reddick

Jim Maner is the Blessings in a Backpack coordinator for the Methodist Church.



## Church of the Advent Supports Community Outreach and Beyond

At the close of 2023, Kit Reddick and Rev. Connie Connelly sat down together to develop a plan for disbursing available outreach funds of \$2,000.00. Disbursements were made to the local community, to the Episcopal Church, to the country, and to the world.

### Community

#### Rev. Connie Connelly

\$100.00 to purchase gift cards Piggly-Wiggly gas cards

#### Martin Memorial Library

\$50.00 for joining Business Partners Program to purchase books

#### Rotary Club of Williamston

\$250.00 as book sponsor for the "I Like Me" Kindergarten Book Project

### Episcopal Church

#### Episcopal Relief and Development

\$400.00

### National

#### Covenant House

\$400.00

### International

#### World Central Kitchen

\$400.00

#### Save the Children

\$400.00



This year the Church of the Advent will be a sponsor for the Rotary Club of Williamston project "I Like Me." Advent will be listed in the books as a community sponsor.

In its second year, the program distributes personalized books for every kindergarten student in Martin County. Often referred to as a "good citizenship" program, **I Like Me!** communicates anti-drug and anti-gang messages, and illustrates gender sensitivity, cultural diversity and the inclusion of people with disabilities.

The program includes teacher material for using the books in the classroom. Studies show the 12-week **I Like Me!** program contributes significantly to the overall growth in positive self-concept in children, in addition to improving reading comprehension and recall through the use of the personalized book.

The books are presented to the children through the use of volunteer readers from the community.

This year the presentation will occur on Monday, March 25. Interested volunteers can contact Kit Reddick for more information. Volunteers can read once or several times during the day.

## Spring training for Christians

The word Lent comes from Middle English and German words for springtime. In light of the start of baseball season, some people call the pre-Easter season "spring training for Christians." This fresh perspective moves away from the flawed understanding that Lent must be somber, or that giving something up for Lent is punishment for sin or a way to earn God's favor.

As people of faith, we should never take a season off. But every so often — at least once a year! — we do well to examine where we need to get back in shape spiritually. Perhaps we will indeed opt to give something up: that swearing habit, sleeping in on Sundays, or the cost of a weekly treat so we can donate the money instead. Or maybe we'll take on something new for Lent: a Bible study, prayer routine or service project.

Hebrews describes spiritual discipline as challenging in the moment but yielding righteousness later. The writer urges us, "Lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees ... so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed" (12:11-13, ESV). May the spring training of Lent strengthen and heal us all.



The Prayer List is found in the notebook marked "Prayer Lists" on the usher's table in the narthex of the church. Names may be added at any time by writing them in the notebook or calling the church office after requesting permission of those for whom prayer is requested. The Prayer List is read aloud weekly at Sunday services. Contact the church office if you wish to have a name added, re-listed, or taken off the list.

**Prayer List**

Janice Ford  
Ann Wallace  
Jessie Critcher  
Rose Allard  
Patti Malone  
Mary Anne Crowe  
Jamie Asby  
Moss Vance  
Bertha & Larry Teele  
Bill Rodenbeck  
Robert & Mary Bonner  
Linda Findeis  
Brian Barber  
Tyler Cox  
Bob Greene  
Mark Curley  
Helen Pistolis

**Birthdays**

3 ~ Christine Chesson  
4 ~ Garrett Godard  
8 ~ Margaret Covington  
16 ~ John Price  
23 ~ Paul Sessoms  
27 ~ Rex Raiford

## MARK YOUR CALENDAR

February 4 Holy Eucharist 11:00am  
Vestry Meeting 12:00noon  
February 11 Holy Eucharist 11:00am  
February 14 Ash Wednesday 6:00pm  
February 18 Morning Prayer 11:00am  
Choral Evensong 5:30pm  
February 25 Holy Eucharist 11:00am  
March 3 Holy Eucharist 11:00am  
Vestry Meeting 12:00noon  
March 10 Morning Prayer 11:00am  
March 17 Holy Eucharist 11:00am  
March 24 Palm Sunday Holy  
Eucharist 11:00am  
March 28 Maundy Thursday 6:00pm  
March 31 Easter Sunday Holy  
Eucharist 11:00am



## Church of the Advent

*Founded 1850*

**Rev. Connie Connelly, Priest in Charge**  
**Office Hours:**

**Tuesday, 10:00 a.m. – 1 p.m.**

**Other hours by appointment**

**Office Phone #: 252.792.2244**

**Cell Phone #: 704-651-0244**

**Doug Chesson, Senior Warden**

**Michael Biondi, Junior Warden**

**Joe Jernigan, Parish Administrator**

**Office Hours:**

**Monday-Friday, 8:00 a.m. – 12 noon**

**Office Phone #: 252.792.2244**

**Brandon Woody, Organist/Choirmaster**

**124 West Church Street**

**P. O. Box 463**

**Williamston, NC 27892**

**Email: [advent1850@gmail.com](mailto:advent1850@gmail.com)**

**[www.williamstonepiscopalchurch.com](http://www.williamstonepiscopalchurch.com)**

### EMERGENCY CONTACT INFORMATION

\*\*\*For pastoral emergencies, contact in this order Connie, Doug, Joe, Michael.

\*\*\*For all problems or issues dealing with the church and rectory buildings and grounds, please contact Joe and then he and Doug will determine how to proceed.

*The Church of the Advent is a nurturing, vibrant, and inclusive community inviting spiritual growth through liturgical worship, outreach, and fellowship.*

---



---

# ***Church of the Advent***

## ***February 2024***

---



---

### ***Lay Schedule***

---

	<b>4</b> <i>5 Epiphany Holy Eucharist 11:00 A.M.</i>	<b>11</b> <i>Last Epiphany Holy Eucharist 11:00 A.M.</i>	<b>14</b> <i>Ash Wednesday Holy Eucharist 6:00 P.M.</i>	<b>18</b> <i>1 Lent Morning Prayer 11:00 A.M.</i>	<b>25</b> <i>2 Lent Holy Eucharist 11:00 A.M.</i>
<b>MP Leader</b>				Jane Jernigan	
<b>Lector</b>	Valerie Cooke	Jane Jernigan	John Price	Kit Reddick	Michael Biondi
<b>Intercessor</b>	Bill Webb	Jane Jernigan			Cathy Cohen
<b>Eucharistic Minister</b>	Bill Webb	Don Beach	John Price		Chloe Tuttle
<b>Acolyte</b>					
<b>Altar Guild</b>	Bob Greene Janice Greene				
<b>Ushers</b>	Bob Greene Janice Greene				