

# St. Mark's Messenger

## January 2025

### Reflections of Father John

After four weeks of patient preparation during Advent, the creche was finally full. Joseph, Mary, and baby Jesus were greeted by the shepherds and the angels, singing Gloria in excelsis (glory to God in the highest), the same song we sing at the beginning of our service. I hope that we sensed that all of God's angels were also singing with us.

Advent 2024 was especially rich for me because of four activities that brought the community into contact with our parish. On December 1 and 15, we had wonderful concerts that not only moved the audience but also raised money for Mother Hubbard's Cupboard. On the first Friday of December we were hosts to the Ice Festival dancers, who performed twice to a completely full parish house (120 people in total). From December 15-19, we "lived" in the Recreation Building, preparing gifts for needy families. Of the 25 volunteers, 16 were from St. Mark's.

And then came Christmas. With 56 people at our Christmas Eve service, the church was fully and beautifully decorated. Kaley's beautiful offertory ("O Holy Night") was magnificent. The congregation actually clapped when she finished. A highlight for me was seeing so many visitors from Breaking Bread Together. Because this was their first time in our church, they were struck not only by the beauty of our building but by the power of our service. "I was really moved," said one man to me. "I had no idea what your service would be like. Wow!"



Christmas marks the moment when God chose to enter our world in a new way. The prophets had been bringing messages for centuries, but sending Jesus, his own son, is unique, a gift of love and hope as well as a promise of peace and justice. Jesus will preach the Good News to a world broken by sin and injustice, war and exploitation. He will seek to make earth much more like heaven and will give specific directions for how this will happen: Matthew 25:45-46 ("the least of these") and the Beatitudes (Matt. 5:1-12).



January is a pivot point for looking back and looking forward, for being honest with ourselves and making resolutions. The world has been shocked by the cruel invasion of Ukraine, now in its third year, and the slaughter of innocents in Israel (October 7, 2023) and warfare in Gaza, now in its second year. More than half of the 45,000 Gaza victims have been children. Let us pray AND work for justice, mercy, and peace in the land where Jesus was born and lived. There can be no peace without justice.

The challenges we face will require thoughtful people to work together for the common good. Now is not a good time for reckless rhetoric. When we say the “Lord’s Prayer,” we pray to “our father,” not “my father.” We are all in this together; there is no Planet B. Let us be followers of our Lord, Jesus of Nazareth, the light of the world and the Prince of Peace. Remember that our Lord and his family were refugees.

May the peace of the Lord be always with you – and may 2025 be filled with joy, peace, and hope!

Father John ✠

### SHARON COPENHAVER

Two days after Christmas, Sharon died after a brief illness. I last talked with her after our Christmas Eve service, and she was joyful about her plans for a Christmas meal with her family – children and grandchildren. Typical of Sharon, she had visited two shutins before coming to church.

Sharon was an active, generous, and kind member of our congregation for many decades. If an activity involved the kitchen, she was a natural leader. Whether it was cooking for Breaking Bread Together or Apple Dumplings or Soup Sales, Sharon was there. She contributed not only to St. Mark’s but to many community organizations like the fire companies.

Our dear friend has gone from Christmas to Easter. May her soul rest in peace and rise in glory in the nearer presence of God.

### ANNUAL MEETING

We will hold our annual meeting on January 12 immediately after our service. Tracey McKee and Fred McKinley are eligible for a second term on vestry, so we will need to elect them along with our delegate and alternate to the Diocesan Convention in October. The reports from our committees will remind you of the



breadth and vitality of our ministries and our hopes for the future.

## CHURCH ENVELOPES

In early January we will distribute church envelopes to people who requested them for their pledge.

## PROPERTY UPDATE

In December we replaced the gutters and repaired parts of the roof on the church. We are so lucky to have an experienced roofer for this complicated work. We are investigating round tables for the parish house; they would be lighter to move and more congenial for gatherings than our heavy, metal tables. We are also researching the best kind of pew cushions. Look for a recommendation early in 2025.

## TOYS FOR TOTS 2024



We helped 250+ families bring a brighter Christmas to 578 children. We distributed at least four toys and a books to every child, and thanks to a raffle, three kids got new bicycles as well. Thanks to generous donors both in Lewistown and outside our area, the tables in the Recreation Building were full of wonderful gifts. We have reserved the building for the same week next December and hope to increase the number of volunteers and contributors.

More than half of the physically able members of our parish were part of the Toys for Tots program this year, which is an astonishingly high percentage. What does this say about us to the community?

## MOTHER HUBBARD'S CUPBOARD & BREAKING BREAD TOGETHER

IN November we helped 501 people. We have been especially busy since November and have distributed many holiday meals along with coats, mittens, and gloves. Through our monthly "Breaking Bread Together" program, we fed nearly 500 people in 2024. Since our BBT Meal in December fell on Christmas Eve and conflicted with our worship service, we invite people to attend our service, and nearly 20 first-time visitors worshiped with us.

### PRAYER LIST

We pray especially for Myra Bannon, Judy Clare, Mary Daily, Shirley Mancino, Tony Hatfield-Nicholson, Dawn Lowe, Doris McKee, Carole Mease, Audrey Scanlan, Lynn Stricker, Patty Wagner, and Evelyn Wilson.

We also pray for those celebrating birthdays and anniversaries this month: Carol Potts (3), Rebecca Ganoe (11), Mark Kaler, Jr. (17), Charles Clare (20), and Erin Anewalt (30).

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