



# THE GEORGIAN REPORT



St. George's Church Schenectady, NY

December 2019

## JOYOUS HOLIDAY REFRAINS HEARD AT KINGSWAY SING-ALONG



*Stella and Bill Schultz*

On Sunday, December 8<sup>th</sup>, eight Georgians were among sixty-five Kingsway residents and family members leading an approximate one-hour holiday sing along. Over twenty holiday favorites ranging from Silent Night to Jingle Bells were enthusiastically sung. Father Matt jovially coordinated the afternoon fielding audience requests while Brian Taylor capably and with occasional flourish provided musical accompaniment.



*David and Anne Kennison, Alice Polumbo, Dr Brian Taylor, Jean Greenspan, Joan Pearson, Father Matt and Jon Pearson led the Kingsway Community holiday sing-along on December 8<sup>th</sup>.*

*alice polumbo*

# OUTREACH

## GENEROUS GEORGIANS SUPPORT FAMILIAR FALL OUTREACH PROJECTS

*Georgians donated 18 coats and 7 heavy sweaters to The City Mission.*

The return of chilly weather signals the arrival of three familiar outreach projects at St George's. Beginning in early October and extending through to Thanksgiving weekend, Georgians placed 18 coats (9 men's, 6 women's, 3 children's) on a rack located in the Great Hall for distribution to The City Mission. This year a request for heavy outdoor style sweaters was included with 7 ultimately donated. The City Mission remains grateful for the Georgian consideration of those who struggle to stay warm in the colder weather.



*Georgian donations*



*Georgian donations*

Two outreach initiatives have kept Georgians busy this December. In support of The Boys and Girls Club of Schenectady and for Advent, Georgians have had the opportunity to fill Zip-Lock style bags with hats and gloves. 39 thoughtfully filled bags along with some extras were taken to a thankful The Boys and Girls Clubs the week of December 16<sup>th</sup> in time for a Christmas distribution. As The Boys and Girls Club has identified hats, gloves as well as socks and underwear as an ongoing need, this outreach project will continue through January, 2020.



*Ralph Pumbo Salvation Army bell ringer*

Finally, Georgians could be spotted vigorously “ringing the bell” in support of the Salvation Army’s annual holiday initiative, Saturday, December 14<sup>th</sup> at the Glenville Price Chopper. Those taking part were: Bob and Lynn Paska, Nancy and Johnnie Angus, David and Anne Kennison, Dusty Ifflander, Toni Cilberti, Jean Greenspan, and Ralph and Alice Pumbo.



*Jean Greenspan Salvation Army bell ringer*

*alice pumbo*

# SALUTING ST. GEORGE'S VOLUNTEERS

When Ann Fuller married Les Duff in 1969 at his family church, St. George's Episcopal, she became Ann Duff and a Georgian. Brought up Roman Catholic, Ann took Les' last name and his religion. "We were married by Fr. Kirby," she reminisces fondly.

Since attending Mass regularly at St. George's for fifty years, Ann has been an integral part of a variety of ministries:

**Rummage Sales:** co-chairing with Debbie Lambeth, they sorted merchandise into departments, assigned department heads, and were there throughout the sales day.

**The Consignment Shop:** Ann worked alongside her late friend, Joan Bessarab, in the Consignment Shop. "Those were the fun years....compiling and pricing merchandise for sale; welcoming return customers; and reselling wanted items no longer needed by their owners."

**Christian Education:** teaching 3<sup>rd</sup> grade Sunday school brought her in contact with the day's youth. "We had a lot of children enrolled in those days."

Ann also headed a vacation bible school, and she co-taught a first communion class with Ann Marie Tomeck.

**The ECW:** President of the Episcopal Church Women was another part of her church resume that she remembers with positive thoughts.

**Altar Guild:** As a hard-working Altar Guild member for many, many years, she said, "I did my duty to this ministry."

A mother (2 sons) and grandmother (3 granddaughters), Ann was active outside of church with a growing family and working for a podiatrist for 28 years. Now retired, she's a regular at the gym. She golfs.... "I'm not a good golfer but I like being outdoors." She bowls.... "I'm not a good bowler but I like the socializing"....and serves as vice president of her weekly bowling league (6 teams) at the Boulevard Bowl on Erie Boulevard.

A "people person" who currently interacts in two important church ministries: Ann is on the rotating Greeter's schedule Sunday mornings, and she especially enjoys talking to those she and Jim Wingate visit as part of Pastoral Care. "They need to know what's going on in their church and in the world. It's rewarding. Parishioners we visit.... whether in private homes, retirement homes or nursing homes....are grateful for the time we spend with them."

This is a hard time for religions in general, but Ann is optimistic. "Fr. Matt is doing a fantastic job as our rector. He's creative and plans something for everyone. His wife April is also doing an excellent job with our youth." Good vibes, too, for our music director, Brian Taylor. "The choir has improved under his directorship." She prefers a Rite 1 Mass and is pleased that St. George's is staying with that tradition.

Strong in her volunteerism and in her enthusiasm, what every church needs these days is an Ann Duff who never waivers in the 3 D's....Dedication, Devotion and Desire to give of her "time" and "talent" to the ministries offered.



lynn paska

## FROM THE RECTOR'S STUDY....



Christmas is an especially joyous time to spend with those we love. For many here at Saint George's it is in particular a time to visit with beloved grandchildren. I know my Mom, for instance, is always delighted to fuss over my own children at Christmas time. For that reason, I thought it would be appropriate to say a bit about our Lord's own grandparents, and the patron saints of all grandparents, Joachim and Anne, the parents of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

The Bible does not tell us about the Virgin Mary's parents. Instead we know of them through the traditions and legends handed down to us. These are recorded in early Christian documents which, although

not canonical, have been held in honor by the church. The earliest and most well known account comes from *the Protevangelium of James*. There we are told that Mary's father Joachim was a very wealthy, generous, and pious man. In reading about Joachim and his wife Anne, one cannot help but be reminded of another wealthy, generous, and pious man, Abraham and his wife Sarah. Like Abraham and Sarah, and like many of the other patriarchs and matriarchs of Holy Scripture, these two, Joachim and Anne, are childless, being advanced in age and unable to conceive. In those days sterility or bareness carried with it a certain degree of shame. Indeed, in the story, when Joachim goes to temple to present his gifts he is rebuked. He is told, "It is not right for you to be first to offer your gifts, for you have not begotten any seed in Israel!"

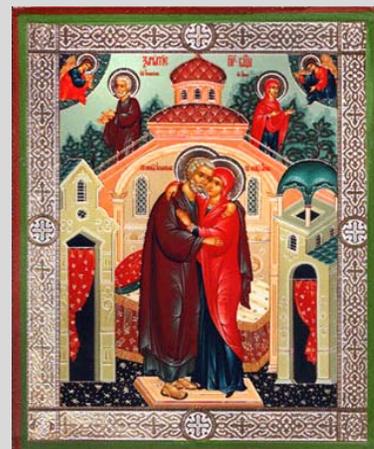
Joachim is grieved at this. The text says, "He did not show himself to his wife, but right away took himself into the wilderness. He pitched a tent and determined to fast for forty days and forty nights. He said to himself, 'I will not go down, not for food nor for drink, until the Lord my God looks upon me. Prayer will be my food and drink.'" Joachim's time in the wilderness recalls his grandson's own forty day wilderness fast.

His wife Anne also is wrestling with God over their infertility and she is visited by an angel who says to her, "Anne, Anne, the Lord God has heard your prayer. You will conceive and bear, and your child will be spoken of in all the inhabited world." At the same time, Joachim too is visited in his prayer and fasting by angel who speaks to him similarly, "Joachim, Joachim, the Lord God has heard your prayer. Go down from here; behold, Anne your wife will conceive in her womb."

It has been so long since last they saw one another. The couple meet at the gate and Anne throws her arms around her husband in joy saying, "Now I know that the Lord God has blessed me exceedingly! For the widow is no longer a widow, and the childless woman conceives in her womb!" The two rush home together to their bedroom. The scene is immortalized in the icon of The Conception of the Mother of God. The Eastern Orthodox theologian Jim Forest in his book *Praying with Icons* writes, "No words better communicate how blessed is the vocation of marriage than the icon of Anne and Joachim embracing each other."

Shortly after the faithfulness of God is confirmed to the couple when they learn that Anne is indeed pregnant. When she is finally delivered of her child she calls her name, "Mary" and she says, "This day my soul is magnified!" Anne sings a song of thanksgiving over her child that recalls Mary's own words in the Magnificat in which she sang when she learned that she had conceived by the Holy Ghost. Anne sings, "I will sing a hymn unto the Lord my God, for he has looked upon me and taken away from me the reproach of my enemies. He has given me the fruit of his righteousness, unique and yet abundant. Who will announce to the children of Reuben that Anne is nursing a baby? Hear, hear, you twelve tribes of Israel: Anne is nursing a baby!"

Both hymns however recall a still earlier song of praise sung by Hannah the mother of the prophet Samuel in 1 Samuel 2:1-10. Hannah was also barren but the Lord heard her prayer and gave to her a son. Hannah, in thanks to God, dedicated her child to the temple. Like Hannah, Anne too, dedicates her



*The Icon of Conception of the Mother of God.*

child to the temple. When Mary was three years old her parents brought her to the Temple where she would be raised. The texts says,

“There the priest welcomed Mary and kissed her, and blessed her saying, ‘The Lord has magnified your name to all generations of the earth. By you, unto the last of days, the Lord God will reveal redemption to the children of Israel.’ Then he sat her down on the third step of the altar, and the Lord God poured out grace upon her. And she danced with her feet, and all the house of Israel loved her.”

We have no way of knowing if Saint Anne or Saint Joachim ever got to hold their grandson, but I like to imagine they did. I imagine that Saint Anne’s soul was once again magnified along with her daughter’s to behold the Son of Mary, the Son of God, the savior of the world, and Word made flesh.

*grace and peace, fr. matthew stromberg*

## FEAST OF ALL SAINTS AT THE CATHEDRAL



*The cathedral’s altar is surrounded by statues of the saints. Fr. Matt is flanked by Rev. Sandra McGowan, Deacon and Eric Reardon, Subdeacon.*



*An enthusiastic group of Georgians attended - Jim & Pam Turley, Brian Taylor, Ciera Williams, Joyce Cockerham, David & Anne Kennison.*

All Saints’ Day is a principal feast day of the church, celebrated in honor of all saints, known and unknown. In Albany, it also marks the patronal festival for our diocese’s Cathedral of All Saints. This year, the day fell on a Friday, launching a festive weekend of cathedral festivities. Fr. Matt was tapped to celebrate the evening Solemn High Mass on November 1<sup>st</sup> and to preach the sermon. The majesty of the cathedral was the perfect setting for a glorious Mass.

*david kennison*

# A CRUISE TO DIE FOR





Thanks to the gung-ho hams of St. George's, we killed the mystery dinner "A Cruise to Die For" on November 9<sup>th</sup>. As guests arrived, our cruise director, Kathy, assigned parts left and right until nearly everyone had something to do, and then we indulged in a wonderful Italian buffet before the evening's entertainment.

Fr. Matt was Captain of our doomed cruise. April Stromberg, clearly a Jersey girl at heart, set the plot in motion with her sad tale of Mikey Gambino, the story becoming more convoluted as glamorous Meredith Ewbank propositioned "Larry," Jeff Wengrovius "Mikey Gambino" showed off his betrayals with "Sue," Joan Pearson "Lil" detailed a fraud, and the ship talent show presented top name acts. In succession the Supremes, the Beach Boys, Elton John, Elvis, Dolly Parton, Cher and Sonny, and the Village People put on glittering performances. I will never forget Richard Simmons and his exercise routine! Over-the-top talent, every one. By the time Mikey Gambino was poisoned, he had been threatened by several passengers. Dr. John Ewbank pronounced him dead while Lt. Bob Paska studied the clues. After some happy confusion, the culprit was revealed. No spoilers here! Many more people acted in the skit and talent show, including Georgians Cora Wareh and her friend Helen, Paul Smigelski, Matt Smigelski, Brian Taylor, Jim Turley, Joyce Cockerham, Rich Unger, Sharon and Jerry Trant, and Ralph Pumbo, plus several participants from the community. It was great fun both to be pulled into the mystery and to watch. Kathy, with her assistants Matt and Matt plus a very busy costume organizer, kept the bedlam under control and the story moving.



Jeff Wengrovius won Alice Pumbo's mystery box raffle, a picnic set of basket, cloth, and wine. As a fundraiser, maybe the evening wasn't a huge success, but as a fun-raiser, it was fabulous.

*joan pearson*

## - HOSPITALITY -

Thank you to Jon and Meredith Ewbank, Gerri Moore, Meg Hughes, Pam Turley, Brian Taylor, Sondra and Jeremy and the Vestry for providing coffee hour treats over the last few months. A sign-

up sheet through February is available in the Great Hall. Please consider taking a Sunday! A separate sheet for our traditional Christmas Eve "sweets and savories" reception is also available.

*sandee hughes*

Rev. Tish Harrison Warren, Church of the Ascension, Pittsburgh, PA.

*In this issue, we continue our moseying journey and offer a piece that was written by a priest in the Anglican Church in North America. It's a personal exploration of the meaning of Advent and we thought it perfect to include in our December newsletter. This article ran in the December 1 2019 issue of the New York Times and is offered here with the gracious approval of the author, Rev. Tish Warren, and author of "Liturgy of the Ordinary: Sacred Practices in Everyday Life."*



**The Rev. Tish Harrison Warren, Co-Associate Rector, Church of the Ascension, Pittsburgh**

As darkness lengthens in late fall, we begin to see the signs of the season — advertisements with giant red bows atop new cars, Christmas music blasting everywhere, the heightened pace of holiday hustle and bustle, lights and garlands speckling every corner of the city.

But inside many church buildings, this time of year looks different. There, we find a countercultural sparseness. The altar is covered in purple, the color of both royalty and repentance. There's a slowing down, a silent stillness. The music turns to minor keys and becomes contemplative, even mournful. The Scripture readings are apocalyptic and trippy, strikingly short on sweet tales of babies, little lambs and Christmas stars. In this small space, Christmas season has not yet begun. The church waits in Advent.

In the church calendar, every period of celebration is preceded by a time of preparation. Historically, Advent, the liturgical season that begins four Sundays before Christmas Day, is a way to prepare our hearts (and minds and souls) for Christmas. For Christians, Christmas is a celebration of Jesus' birth — that light has come into darkness and, as the Gospel of John says, "the darkness could not overcome it." But Advent bids us first to pause and to look, with complete honesty, at that darkness.

To practice Advent is to lean into an almost cosmic ache: our deep, wordless desire for things to be made right and the incompleteness we find in the meantime. We dwell in a world still racked with conflict, violence, suffering, darkness. Advent holds space for our grief, and it reminds us that all of us, in one way or another, are not only wounded by the evil in the world but are also wielders of it, contributing our own moments of unkindness or impatience or selfishness.

I'm well aware that for most Americans, Christmas has less to do with contemplating the incarnation of Jesus than celebrating friends, family, reindeer and Black Friday sales. Even among observant Christians, the holiday season has often been flattened into a sentimental call to warm religious feelings (if not a charged yet pointless argument over "Happy Holidays" versus "Merry Christmas"). Still, I think Advent offers wisdom to the wider world. It reminds us that joy is trivialized if we do not first intentionally acknowledge the pain and wreckage of the world.

G.K. Chesterton wrote that original sin is the "only part of Christian theology which can really be proved." The believer and atheist alike can agree that there is an undeniable brokenness to the world, a sickness that needs remedy. Whether we assign blame to human sinfulness, a political party, corporate greed, ignorance, tribalism or nationalism (or some of each), we can admit that things are not as they should be — or at least, not as we wish they were.

I did not grow up observing Advent or, for that matter, knowing what it was. Like many Americans, my family began celebrating Christmas the day after Thanksgiving. When I started attending an Anglican church in my late 20's, Advent drew me in. With its quiet beauty and doleful hymns, this season made intuitive emotional sense to me.

American culture insists that we run at breathless pace from sugar-laced celebration to celebration — three months of Christmas to the Super Bowl, Mardi Gras, Valentine's Day, Cinco de Mayo, Fourth of July, and

on and on. We suffer from a collective consumerist mania that demands we remain optimistic, shiny, happy and having fun, fun, fun.

But life isn't a Disney Cruise. The tyranny of relentless mandatory celebration leaves us exhausted and often, ironically, feeling emptier. Many of us suffer from "holiday blues," and I wonder whether this phenomenon is made worse by the incessant demand for cheer — the collective lie that through enough work and positivity, we can perfect our lives and our world.

I do not want to be the Grinch tsk-tsking anyone for decorating the tree early or firing up "Jingle Bell Rock" before the 25<sup>th</sup>. I'm all for happiness, joy, eggnog, corny sweaters and parties, but to rush into Christmas without first taking time to collectively acknowledge the sorrow in the world and in our own lives seems like an inebriated and overstuffed practice of denial.

The church, after all, reserves 12 whole days for feasting and festivity during Christmas. Both darkness and light are real, and our calendar gives time to recall both. But in the end, Christians believe the light is more real and more enduring. There is still good news to celebrate, even when — perhaps especially when — it's been a hard year.

The arrival of Christmas Day is not the culmination of the holiday season, but merely the starting pistol for almost two weeks of good food and drink, parties and community gatherings, lights and gifts, service and time together. Times of worship become jubilant and joyful: White replaces purple, babies are finally placed in mangers, and Christmas carols fill the air.

My church community tries to keep the party going for 12 whole days, which can be a little hard when everyone else's tree is on the curb and school is starting up again, but we try nonetheless. Christians are called to take up celebration as intentionally as they take up waiting.

We need communal rhythms that make deliberate space for *both* grief and joy. For me, the old saying rings true: Hunger is the best condiment. Abstaining, for a moment, from the clamor of compulsive jollification, and instead leaning into the reality of human tragedy and of my own need and brokenness, allows my experience of glory at Christmastime to feel not only more emotionally sustainable but also more vivid, vital and cherished.

Our response to the wrongness of the world (and of ourselves) can often be an unhealthy escapism, and we can turn to the holidays as anesthesia from pain as much as anything else. We need collective space, as a society, to grieve — to look long and hard at what is cracked and fractured in our world and in our lives. Only then can celebration become deep, rich and resonant, not as a saccharine act of delusion but as a defiant act of hope.

*david kennison*

## **- ALL ON THE SAME PAGE BOOK CLUB -**

St. George's book club is currently reading *Good Neighbor: The Life and Works of Fred Rogers*, by Maxwell King, and will discuss it on January 12<sup>th</sup> after Mass.

The next selection for consideration is *The Ninth Hour* by Alice McDermott. This fictional tale delves into an Irish-Catholic community in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Brooklyn, highlighting the struggles and heroic efforts of The Little Nursing Sisters of the Sick Poor. Discussion is set for March 8<sup>th</sup>.

Mark this on your 2020 calendar: the entire parish is invited to participate in the book club's final event before its summer hiatus. St. George's will proudly host author/poet Marly Youmans of Cooperstown for a presentation at coffee hour on May 17<sup>th</sup>. Ms. Youmans has produced an impressive array of novels, stories and poems. All Georgians are encouraged to acquaint themselves with her work before meeting her next spring. Watch to details to follow, or ask Meg Hughes for recommended reading that will help you gear up.

*meg hughes*

## - JUNIOR WARDEN'S REPORT-

Our long-standing boiler issues are now under control. The kick plate at the threshold of the Rectory has been repaired. I have addressed an out-of-commission toilet in the girls' bathroom upstairs in the Great Hall. I'm also working on soliciting a variety of estimates for repair/replacement of tiles in the entry of the Great Hall.

Our snowblower is in the shop but should be ready in time for the ravages of winter. Unfortunately, the cost to fix the machine may rival the cost of a brand new, heavier duty snow-thrower.



*jon ewbank*

## MUSIC AT ST. GEORGE'S

The St. Cecilia Choir is preparing for the Incarnation seasons and especially for Christmas. This year we inaugurate a new tradition on Christmas Eve. At 9:30PM the choir will offer a carol concert with choral renditions of both more familiar and less familiar carols. Congregational singing will also be part of this pre-service offering. At 10PM we will offer our Candlelight Christmas Eve Mass in which the choir will sing a choral setting of the Mass, The Mass of the Quiet Hour, by George Oldroyd. Of course the great Christmas hymns will figure prominently in this service as well.



Those who choose to worship on Christmas Day instead of Christmas Eve will also enjoy a full Mass including hymns and proper chants. I will be on the organ bench that morning accompanying the congregation on the hymns. It is my personal joy to be able to play the organ for a service on Christmas morning.

The following Sunday, December 29<sup>th</sup>, we will offer a Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols. The congregation will be the choir for this service as we sing yet more of the carols of the season.

Looking ahead to Sunday, February 2<sup>nd</sup>, we will celebrate the feast of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple, also known as the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary or Candlemas. This is the 40<sup>th</sup> day after Christmas. The choir will again offer a choral mass setting, Missa Brevis No. 4 by Healey Willan. This setting is based on the hymn tune Divinum Mysterium to which we sing the hymn Of the Father's Love Begotten.

Finally, I should note two special compositions will be part of our Christmas celebration. On Christmas Eve the choir's communion anthem will be Verbum caro factum est (And the Word became flesh) by Anthony St. Pierre of Toronto, Ontario. Mr. St. Pierre was a boy chorister here at St. George's Church in the 1960's when Fred Monks was Organist-Choirmaster. He recently sent me this composition which I am pleased to use this Christmas. And on Epiphany Day the choir will sing my composition on the same text which I wrote 20 years ago.

Besides all this, the choir has anthems planned for every Sunday throughout the Incarnation seasons. I look forward to my first Christmas here at St. George's.

*brian taylor*

*Parishioners learned a lot about church finances from a PowerPoint Presentation given by treasurer Dr. Jeffrey Wengrovius at the 2019 Stewardship Campaign luncheon after Mass on November 17<sup>th</sup>.*



# PET BLESSING



There were pet “snacks” and a meaningful service by Fr. Matt Stromberg as we celebrated the Feast Day of Francis of Assisi with a very special Pet Blessing at St. George’s on Sunday, October 6<sup>th</sup>. An Italian friar and beloved saint who founded the Franciscan Order for men and the Order of Saint Clare for women, he is also known for his love of nature and animals. The service was held inside the church as it looked suspiciously like rain.

Remember the song “Dance with Me, Henry?” Jameson wouldn’t dance with his owner Chris, but he did make enough noise so that everyone noticed the big, beautiful, black lab with the loud tonsils. Among the dogs and cats attending: Corduroy, a cairn terrier, was here again with his human Mom and Dad; tiny Oakley, a multi-poo; Snickers, a gray cat owned by Ciera Williams; 2 rat terriers, Eleanor and Pepper; Mackie, a rescue akita with his human Tina; a very well behaved standard poodle named Pel Ami; and feline Sable Stromberg with her human family....mom April, sister April and brother Isaac.

With no “exotic” pets in attendance, Brian Taylor has promised to come to the Blessing of the Animals next year....with his pet rock.



*lynn paska*



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*The Vestry*

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 Ralph Polumbo  
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 Gregory Thomas  
 James Turley  
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## WEDDING BELLS

On Saturday, December 8th, we witnessed the culmination of St. George's love story. Scott Hartz and Shannon Hughes both grew up at St. George's and even received first communion together from former rector Father Marshall Vang. Even in those early days there was a budding romance, but now has bloomed into a beautiful marriage. Father Matt officiated at the service and Father Vang returned to preach the homily and offer a final blessing. Scott is the son of choir member and current senior warden Suzanne Hartz and her husband Steve Hartz who often serves on our altar. Shannon is the daughter of vestry member Sandra Hughes and her husband Peter Hughes. All of us at St. George's couldn't be happier!



*fr. matthew stromberg*

**A REMINDER:**

St. George's services are broadcast on television:



Spectrum Schenectady Access Channel now on channel 1301 - or Verizon Fios Channel 36 - Sundays at 4:30PM