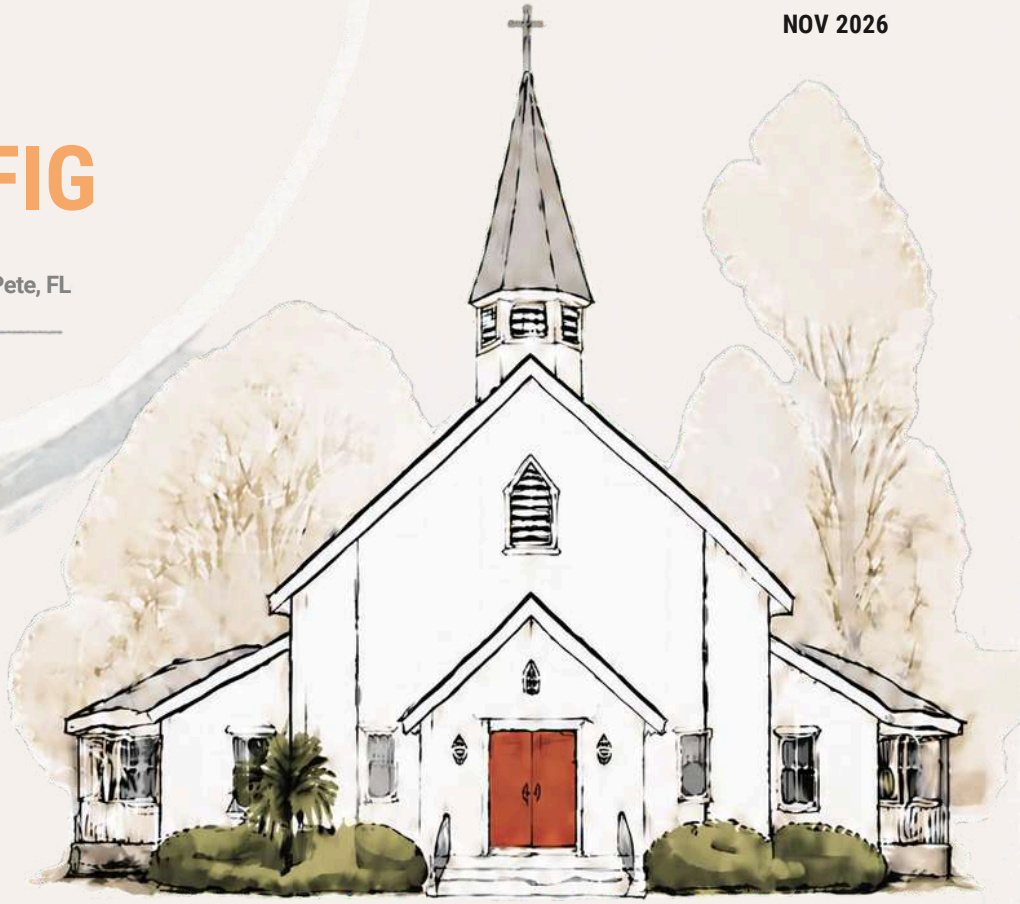
VOL. 2 ISSUE 5

NOV 2026

UNDER THE FIG

Saint Bartholomew's Episcopal Church - St. Pete, FL



ALL SAINTS DAY

THE REV. ETHAN COLE

This past summer during my time away at Sewanee I took a preaching class and my colleagues preached to one another a sermon for a feast day in the life of the church. It was an opportunity for each of us to preach to fellow priests about our theological understanding of the great days of the church year. I was particularly moved by the preaching of my friend The Rev. Jimmy Abbott, rector of Trinity Church, Galveston. He preached on the text appointed for All Saints' Day, Revelation 7:9-17. In Revelation, John is given a series of unfolding visions of the heavenly throne room, where the Lamb (who is Jesus Christ) is seated on the throne of God. The throne room is surrounded by God's holy ones, the saints. Jimmy preached:

"This day, this commemoration...it's not about us. It's not about humans, however saintly they are or not. All of it, all of it, must be about the Living God. The temptation, as humans, is always to put ourselves at the center. To put ourselves on the throne...What All Saints' is doing is kicking us off the throne of our own egos. It is God, the Living God and the Lamb...at the center. At the center of our lives, at the center of attention, at the center of All Saints' Day ...at the center of all things."

This issue:

ALL SAINTS' DAY

ANNOUNCEMENTS

COMMON GROUND

FAITH, FREEDOM & FIRE

THE BEATITUDES

BLESSING OF ANIMALS RECAP

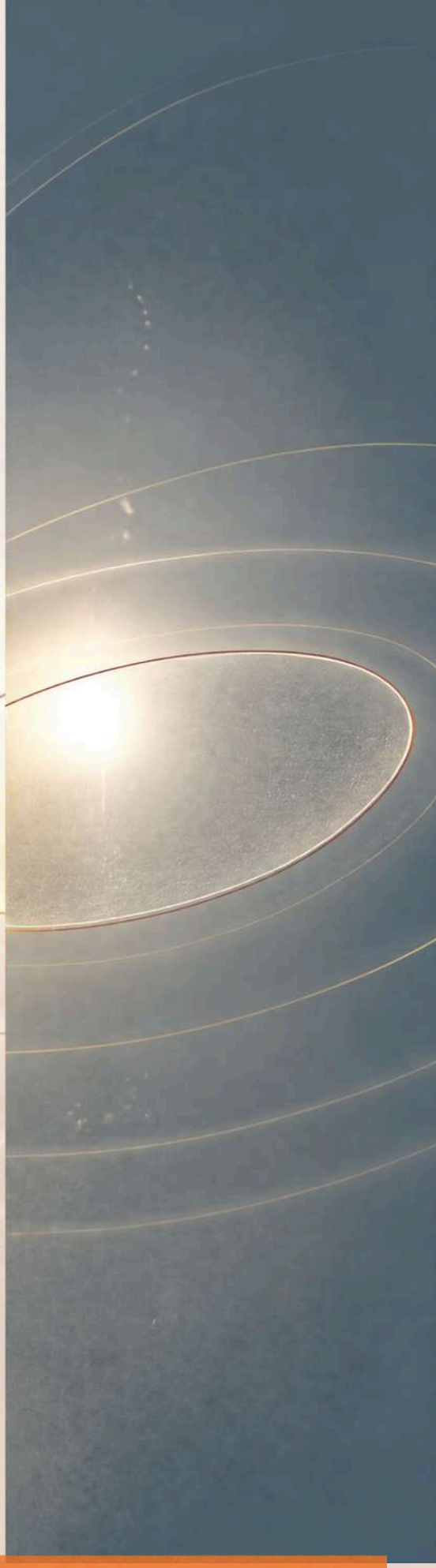
SMOKING

All Saints' Day, in spite of all its glorious music and exalted liturgy, points us toward humility, to the diminishment of self-importance in the presence of the God who gives all true meaning and purpose to human life. The triumphant saints, known and unknown, show us not themselves, but Jesus.

We live in a time when self-promotion, self-actualization, self-centeredness is the norm rather than self-abnegation and self-denial or the pouring out of our own lives for the sake of others. The glory of the saints around the throne is reflected glory, and that is the point. The victory of the saints is the victory of Jesus—the shining ones are shining with the light of Christ. "Holy, holy, holy! all the saints adore thee, Casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea," so says the old hymn.

For us, the path toward sainthood is the path of blessedness as laid out in Scripture: Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be filled. Love God and love your neighbor. Seek peace and pursue it. Serve God by acting in the best interests of the poor, the sick, the hungry, and the oppressed.

When we acknowledge that the Lamb is the center, and let ourselves be part of a great cloud of witnesses rather than seek to be the star of the show, we may find ourselves illuminated and illuminating, righteous in our generation.





Philippians
Evening Bible Study
with Sim Mentouri

8 Sessions on Philippians

Come have a discussion on how this epistle of joy can bring encouragement to your daily life.



No study guide needed.

All are welcome!



Tuesdays
October 6 - November 24

6:30 - 7:30 pm

Parish Hall

No registration required

St. Bart's
Episcopal Church

Community Bible Study Series
with Jane Snyder

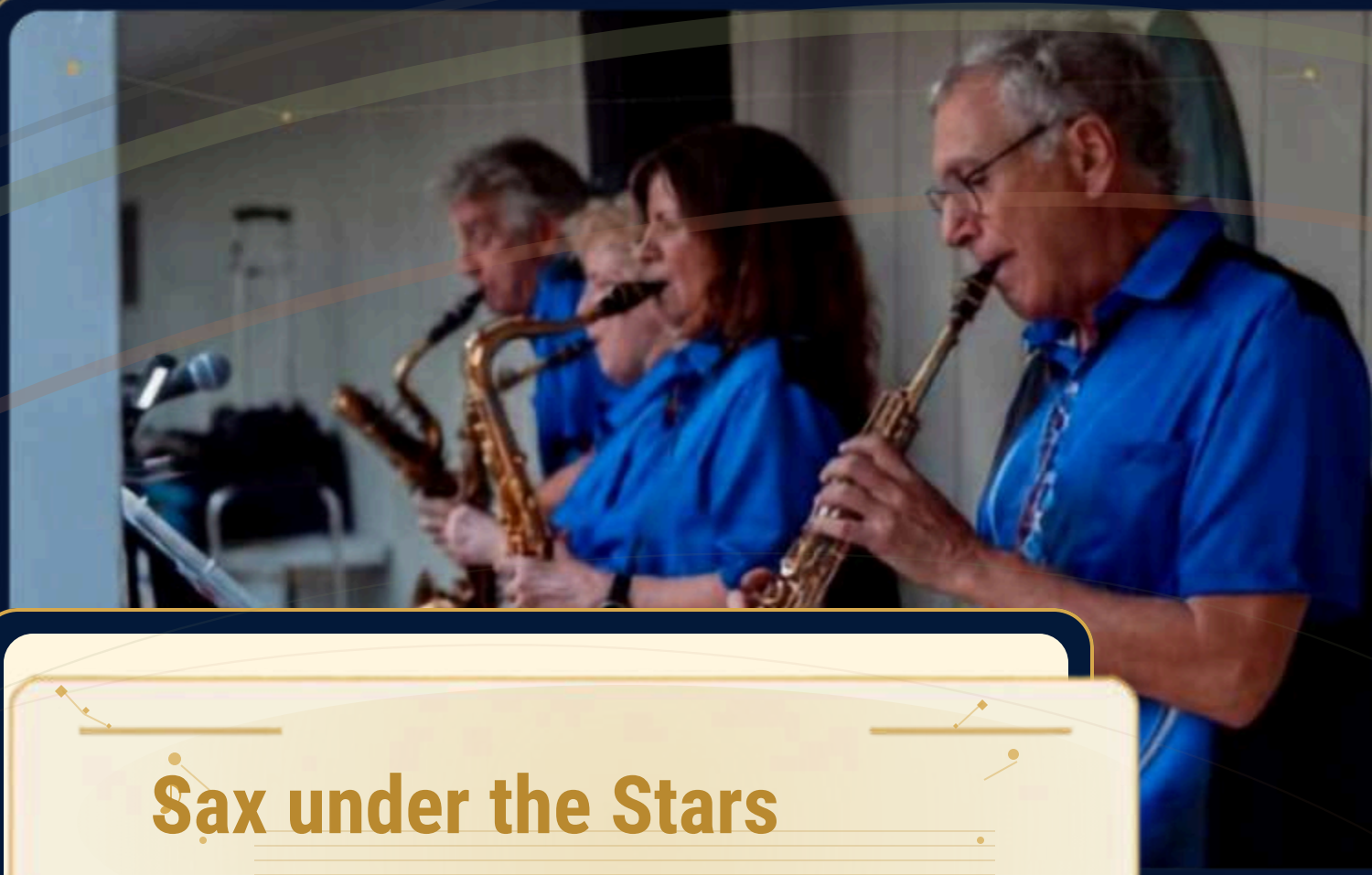
MONDAYS | 6:30 - 7:30 PM

OCTOBER 26 • NOVEMBER 2 • NOVEMBER 9 • NOVEMBER 16



WEEKS 1 & 2:
The Dead Sea Scrolls

WEEKS 3 & 4:
Thanksgiving in the Bible – 9 Examples



Sax under the Stars

An Evening of Music & Fellowship

Friday, November 6, 6:00–7:30 p.m.

Live music by the St. Pete Sax Quartet

Wine & non-alcoholic beverages

Light appetizers

Stewardship Thank You Dinner

Thursday, November 19

6:30-8:00 PM

Parish Hall

Breakfast-for-dinner celebration

Thanking the St. Bart's family for their generosity and support

You are warmly invited to share a meal, celebrate our parish, and give thanks together.





St. Bart's/Oakland Cemetery Landmark designation party

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Recurring Events:

Holy Communion Service, Rite I, Sundays, 8:00 a.m.

Rite II, Sundays, 10:00 a.m. Choir and music.

Rector's Forum, Sundays, 9:00-9:45 a.m. Parish hall.

Coffee and Lectionary Chat, Tuesdays, 7:45-8:45 a.m. Parish hall. A casual and reflective time with Father Ethan to explore the upcoming Sunday's scriptures over coffee.

Holy Communion with Prayers for Healing, Tuesdays, 9:30 a.m. Come experience a 30-minute Holy Communion service with prayers for healing, including laying on of hands and anointing with oil.

Let's Read the Bible! (from the beginning) Wednesdays, 10:00-11:00 a.m. Parish hall. Coffee provided—come early and enjoy fellowship before we begin!

Alcoholics Anonymous Meeting, Fridays, 11:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. Parish hall.
A closed AA meeting for members or those who wish to stop drinking.

Book Club - Last Wednesday of the month. 1:30-2:30 p.m. Parish hall.
November: *Maddy* by S.L. Sumner. Contact: Alieda Maron – (863) 661-6932

The "Sew What Studio", 1st Thursday of the month. 10:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m. Parish hall.
All fabric and craft projects are welcome! Some sewing machines and notions provided.

Garden Club, 2nd Saturday of the month. 10:00 a.m. Church ground. Volunteers needed. Contact: Orin Linder – (813) 967-1978

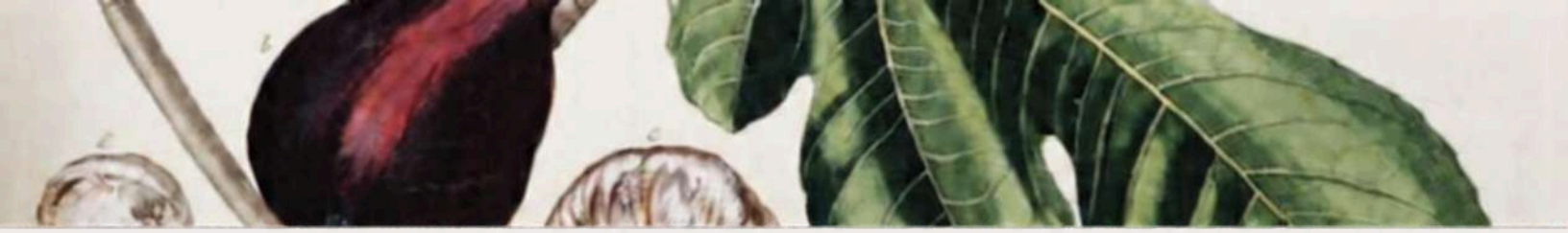
Coffee Hour Hosts. Sign up on the corkboard outside the kitchen. For questions, contact Lynne Clayton – (727) 239-5147 or lynneclayton@aol.com

Kitchen Committee, volunteers needed. Assist during Lent, Easter, and other key events. Contact (727) 867-7015, office@stbartsinstpete.org

Boyd Hill Walk. Saturday. November 7, 9 a.m. Meet in the parking lot in front of the visitor center. 1101 Country Club Way S, St Pete, FL 33705. Bring $3 admission fee, no dogs allowed. Contact: Ben Tong, Benstpetefl@yahoo.com or 202 468 6595

Blood Pressure Checks. Every first Sunday of the month. 11:15 a.m.-12:00 noon. Parish hall.

Food Drive for Sanderlin Family Center. Non-perishable food and essential household items collected every first Sunday of the month. Brown paper bags with the list of needed items are handed out during the last Sunday of every month before service.



COMMON GROUND:A COMMUNITY OF SAINTS

BEN TONG

What does it mean to be a saint? Often, the word conjures images of stained-glass windows, ancient monasteries, or historic figures who achieved heroic heights of virtue. Holiness is seen as something distant—a prize reserved for a select few.

But holiness is not a solitary journey, nor is it confined to history books. The writer Robert Eltsberg notes that a saint is simply “someone who reminds us of Jesus.” They expand our understanding of how to live out the Beatitudes in ordinary, everyday ways. We are bounded together by a shared desire to reflect Christ’s love—a bond that even death cannot sever. Many Christians embrace the vibrant traditions of *Día de los Muertos* (Day of the Dead) alongside All Saints' Day. By building *ofrendas* (altars) filled with photos, candles, and marigolds, we visually affirm that our deceased loved ones remain active members of our spiritual family. When one of us stumbles, there is a community ready to lift them up, and when one succeeds, we all rejoice.

We see this definition of community in action all around us. During my naturalization in 2025 St. Bart's parishioners lived out their Christian values by joining me on that joyous day. This deep sense of fellowship is woven into our very identity, beginning more than 250 years ago during the American Revolution when American Anglicans first planted our parish roots.

We continue that long tradition of worship on All Saints' Day. In this issue, Brien Gibney takes a look at composer Bob Chilcott's The Beatitudes, which is the anthem for the St. Bart's service on November 1.

Chilcott's piece is a musical setting of the blessings pronounced by Jesus during the Sermon on the Mount. The Beatitudes define what it means to live a holy, Christ-like life. Instead of celebrating power or wealth, they honor qualities like humility, mercy, purity of heart, peacemaking, and endurance through persecution. Because All Saints' Day honors all saints—both the famous figures and the quiet, unsung believers—this text is a beautiful portrait of the virtues our saints embody. This dual honor also mirrors the heart of *Día de los Muertos*. Rather than mourning the dead with somber distance, both traditions invite us to celebrate the unsung saints of our own families with joy, color, and music, recognizing that their ordinary, Christ-like lives paved the way for our own.

Living as a community of saints also means carrying one another's burdens, including our physical health. Faith community nurse Tom Maxwell tackles smoking in his health article. This subject seems to have little to do with holiness, but smoking can problematize relationships and divide families. When someone suffers from a preventable illness, the community shares in that burden of grief, caretaking, and loss.

As we celebrate All Saints' Day, let us commit to lifting each other up in spirit, in song, and in health.



FAITH, FREEDOM, AND FIRE: A MEMOIR FOR AMERICA'S 250TH YEAR

BEN TONG

On a sunny, crisp January morning in 2025, I stood inside the federal courthouse in Tampa and looked around the room. A few of the would-be citizens were dressed casually in polo shirts, khaki pants, and jeans. By a fortuitous coincidence, I had chosen a sports coat and tie from Brooks Brothers—a New York institution founded in 1818 that famously outfitted Constitution architect James Madison and nearly every U.S. president since. I hadn't picked it out for its history; it was simply a quiet way to show respect for a milestone I had weighed for decades, yet it anchored me in a piece of living American history on the day I joined it.

Many Americans trace their lineage through centuries of family trees—pointing to faded portraits, names etched on Revolutionary War memorials, or generation-old family Bibles handed down through the years. My path to America's 250th anniversary year looks nothing like that.

I grew up as a Chinese Christian gay man in Malaysia, a land of thick tropical jungles and mist-covered mountains that frame modern urban skyscapes, and fiercely hospitable people that share a dizzying variety of cuisines and cultures mingling since the heydays of the spice trade of the 15th century that looped from Europe to China via the Straits of Malacca. Yet underneath that vibrant tapestry sits a society where your birth certificate predetermines your ceiling. My hard work hit a wall when the state's race-based quotas barred me from attending law school, leaving me to pursue an education degree instead. Minorities in that system faced legal caps on buying a home, securing a corporate job, or opening a business, while speaking openly about my faith to the Malay majority was a criminal offense. This was apartheid turned upside down. Worse, the shadow of colonial-era sodomy laws remained on the books—even though rarely enforced, they kept me deep in the closet.





When a university in the United States offered me a scholarship for graduate studies, the opportunity meant giving up a teaching job guaranteed until retirement age—a government position where, barring criminal charges, teachers are virtually never fired. The trade, in 1989, at just 23 years old, meant exchanging a lifetime of predictability for two large suitcases. Walking away, I knew I was doing the right thing for myself, even though I was still anxious about the unknown future ahead of me. What followed was a decades-long journey navigating the maze-like American immigration system—moving from a F-1 student visa to a J-1 visa for postdoctoral fellowships, and eventually to a H-1B visa for professionals and educators, becoming a permanent resident in 2004.

That permanent residency remained mine for twenty years, keeping one foot in each world because I wasn't sure if I would need to return to Malaysia to care for my elderly parents. When they passed away, the ties holding me to my birthplace were broken.

Yet, the final push to seek citizenship in 2024 came from a different kind of urgency. Looking at the growing political uncertainty in America, I began to fear that even permanent residency status could one day become contested and unstable. Over three decades, I had developed deep, irreplaceable roots in this country—roots that included my nascent spiritual growth as an Episcopalian. On Sundays when the political noise felt loudest, I found my anchors in the steady rhythm of the liturgy, the shared chalice, and the familiar prayers for the nation in our prayer book. I realized I could no longer leave my future, or my faith community, to chance.

Because I had to live through those long years of waiting, wrestling, and confronting new uncertainties, American citizenship was never a casual birthright to me; it was the hard-won destination of a life spent looking for a courtroom where the law would finally look at me and see an equal.

Of course, America is far from perfect. It is a nation built on a profound contradiction. I see it whenever I drive past the segregated history of St. Pete's neighborhoods, or when I look at the magnificent promise of equality etched into the local courthouse marble—idealism sitting side-by-side with our deep flaws, systemic injustices, and a political culture that struggles to extend dignity to those on the margins.

Our history is a recurring cycle of opening doors and slamming them shut. My presence here follows generations of hardship: the nineteenth-century Irish and Italian immigrants who arrived only to face sharp social and even economic ostracism; the late-nineteenth-century Chinese laborers who were abruptly cut off by the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, a law that set a legal and racial precedent for broader Asian exclusion in later decades; and the hundreds of thousands of Mexican workers scapegoated during the Great Depression of the 1930s and deported to their birth country. Then, some 120,000 Japanese Americans—two-thirds of them birthright U.S. citizens—were stripped of due process and herded into desert incarceration camps behind barbed wire, guarded by armed soldiers during World War II. Yet, what drew me here was the unique framework of constitutional liberty—the idea that the American experiment isn't a finished product, but an ongoing struggle to close the gap between our high ideals and our lived realities.

The gravity of that struggle felt personal at the courthouse. While the formal legal proceedings unfolded at the front of the room, my eyes kept drawing back to the pew nearest the door. In that grand federal space, the most profound presence wasn't the legal or bureaucratic pageantry—the robed judge; the single American flag on its floor-sized stand; several members of the Daughters of the American Revolution handing out pins, pocket-sized copies of the Constitution, and handheld flags; the reading of the roll call naming every candidate and their country of origin; and the reciting of the Oath of Allegiance—it was the quiet snapshot of community in the back.

Six members of my church had come to bear witness to this moment. I looked over at Father Ethan, distinct in his black clergy shirt, white collar, and khaki pants, who had set an infant car seat down next to his mother, Faith. Inside, his two-month-old child, Isaac, remained sound asleep throughout the entire one-hour ceremony. Seeing three generations of an Episcopal family under that soft, vaulted courthouse glow was a vivid reminder of what our community is at its best: a place that opens its doors, welcomes the newcomer, and walks alongside one another.

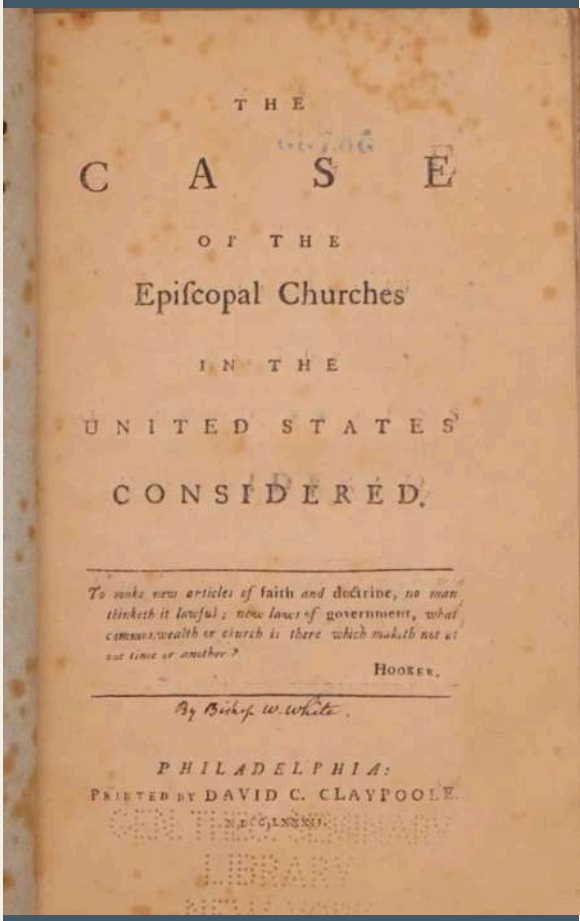
Becoming a citizen right on the doorstep of America has made me look at our church's history with fresh eyes. Every Sunday when we kneel or stand in the pews, we are participating in a tradition that was forged in that same revolutionary era, forced to navigate a precarious and painful identity crisis. Before 1776, our parishes belonged to the Church of England. Every single ordained priest was legally required to swear a solemn oath of allegiance to the British Crown, promising to pray publicly for the King. When the Revolution began, such an oath in a patriot-controlled area was seen as treason against the revolution. Conversely, omitting it was viewed by traditionalists as a violation of a sacred vow to God.





When the Declaration of Independence was signed, that oath became a geopolitical landmine. Parishes were violently fractured; in the North, many loyalist clergy fled the country, while in the Middle and Southern colonies, patriot clergy chose to transfer their loyalties to the American cause. They literally took scissors to their Books of Common Prayer, physically cutting out the prayers for the King and pasting in prayers for the Continental Congress.

Cut off from the mother church, stripped of government tax support, and left completely without bishops to oversee them, the remaining parishes faced total collapse. Out of that literal fire, brilliant leaders like the Rev. William White of Philadelphia and chaplain to the Continental Congress stepped forward to save the pieces. In his landmark 1782 pamphlet, *The Case of the Episcopal Churches in the United States Considered*, White proposed something revolutionary: the church would preserve the ancient, timeless beauty of the sacraments, the apostolic succession, and the Book of Common Prayer, but it would discard the monarchical structure.


THE
CASE
OF THE
Episcopal Churches
IN THE
UNITED STATES
CONSIDERED.

To make new articles of faith and doctrine, no man thinketh it lawful; new laws of government, what commonwealth or church is there which maketh not at one time or another?

HOOKER.

By Bishop W. White.

PHILADELPHIA:
PRINTED BY DAVID C. CLAYPOOLE.

Instead, they designed a democratic system of church governance featuring a General Convention where laypeople sat alongside clergy with equal representation and voting rights. No church law could be passed, and no bishop could be elected, without the consent of the laity. It was a deliberate ecclesiastical mirror to the new American Republic's Constitution, heavily influenced by church members like James Madison himself. Just as the United States was a federation of independent states, the Episcopal Church became a federation of independent dioceses.

Our spiritual ancestors proved that a community could be deeply anchored in ancient, sacred traditions while remaining completely committed to a future of self-governance and individual liberty. By marrying ancient sacramental liturgy with Enlightenment-era democratic governance, these leaders managed to preserve a faith tradition stretching back to antiquity, while proving it could thrive in an atmosphere of radical political liberty.

That historical resilience makes me think deeply about our upcoming elections this November. For decades, election days came and went from the sidelines. Campaign yard signs dotted the lawns, debate screens flickered in my living room, and I saw my neighbors line up at local precincts, knowing my voice couldn't be counted inside the ballot box. This year is entirely different.

In a time when politics is fractured, I find myself looking at the voting booth not through the lens of a political party, but through the lens of gratitude. In the Episcopal Church, we are reminded by our baptismal covenant to strive for justice and peace among all people, and to respect the dignity of every human being. Having seen firsthand how fragile these democratic systems can be, the physical act of taking a ballot into my hands is a serious, practical extension of that stewardship. Slipping behind that voting booth partition isn't a chore; it is a quiet, sanctuary-like moment—the literal fulfillment of what those revolutionaries fought for 250 years ago, and what millions of immigrants wait decades to participate in, while others never do.

Scripture reminds us in Galatians 5:13 that we have been called to liberty, but instructs us: "Do not use your liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another." When we cast our ballots this November—no matter how we vote—we are participating in a miracle of self-governance that has survived for two and a half centuries. We are keeping the fire of that original freedom alive for the next generation—for babies just like Isaac, who will inherit what we protect today.





THE BEATITUDES

BRIEN GIBNEY

The St. Bart's choir will perform "The Beatitudes" by Bob Chilcott on All Saints' Day. Widely considered a contemporary hero of British choral music, Chilcott is a composer, former King's College chorister and choral scholar, and former member of The King's Singers. He is also the Principal Guest Conductor for the BBC Singers. He has conducted choirs in over 30 countries and has a large catalogue of music of various styles and genres from sacred works to Christmas carols. This composition of the Beatitudes is quite moving, and it is based on the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 5:3-11.



The words of this piece are directly out of Matthew's Gospel and I found it useful to read along while it was being sung. The harmonies are quite lovely. Most of us know the Beatitudes, and the one that I remember most vividly is "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth".

In hearing or reciting them, it is important to do it prayerfully, for I believe that music is a form of prayer in and of itself. During Bible study, we have often discussed how hearing Scripture set to music—rather than simply read aloud—can offer a deeper understanding of the words and provide new insights through the shift in how we listen. I found that is so in this composition. I was working harder to better understand for myself the meaning of the words in my own life.

Music is a gift from God and it provides an avenue to a better understanding not only of Him but of this world He has created for us. I therefore challenge anyone who may be looking for other ways to pray and listen to what God sets before you to use music as a prayer form of both adoration and oblation. We are blessed to have a wonderful choir at St. Bart's. Take the opportunity—whether you are singing your favorite hymn, listening to an anthem, or hearing the Psalms—to actively listen to the words. You may find that God Is speaking through them to your own heart.

BLESSING OF THE ANIMALS, OCT. 3








DOGS
CATS
Connect
WITH US





HEALTH CORNER: CARING FOR BODY, MIND, & SPIRIT

BREATHING FREE: A SEASON FOR LETTING GO

TOM MAXWELL, RN

Each Sunday we pray to be delivered from "all that may hurt the body or the soul." For many in our parish family, and for people we love, tobacco and nicotine are among those hurts. If you smoke, vape, or chew, this note isn't meant to scold you. It's an invitation.

Why It's Worth It, at Any Age

Your body begins to heal within hours of your last cigarette. Over the following weeks, circulation and lung function improve. Over the years that follow, your risk of heart attack, stroke, and many cancers drops steadily. It's never too late. People who quit in their 60s and 70s still gain healthier years.

Free Help, Close to Home

You don't need insurance and you don't pay anything for the following:

- **Phone Quit (Florida Quitline):** 1-877-U-CAN-NOW (1-877-822-6669). A trained Quit Coach will help you assess your addiction and build a personalized quit plan.
- **Group Quit:** Free, expert-led sessions with free nicotine patches, gum, or lozenges for adults when medically appropriate. They cover all forms of tobacco. In Pinellas, sessions are run by Gulfcoast North AHEC. Recent locations include BayCare St. Anthony's Hospital (1200 7th Ave. N., St. Petersburg) and HCA Northside Hospital (6006 49th St. N.). Registration is required, either by calling Gulfcoast North AHEC at 813-929-1000 or online at TobaccoFreeFlorida.com/GroupQuitCalendar.
- **Web Quit, texting, and more:** Tobacco Free Florida also offers online support, text messaging, a Quit Guide, and helpful emails. Visit tobaccofreeflorida.com/quityourway.
- **Your doctor or pharmacist:** Ask about prescription medicines and nicotine replacement. Many insurance plans, including Medicare, cover them.

A few first steps

1. Pick a quit date. The Great American Smokeout (November 19) is a good one, and so is the first Sunday of Advent.
2. Know your triggers, such as morning coffee, the car, or stress, and plan what you'll do instead.
3. Tell someone. Let a friend, family member, or fellow parishioner pray for you and check on you.
4. Be gentle with yourself. Most people need more than one attempt. A slip is not a failure. It's part of learning.

If You Love Someone Who Smokes

Encouragement works better than pressure. Offer to go with them to a Group Quit session, keep them company through cravings, and celebrate each smoke-free day.

We're Here For You

Your parish nurses are glad to talk with you privately and help you choose a quit option. Find us at coffee hour or contact the parish office. Every conversation is confidential.

"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you?" (1 Corinthians 6:19)



140th Anniversary

2027

1887

Newsletter Team

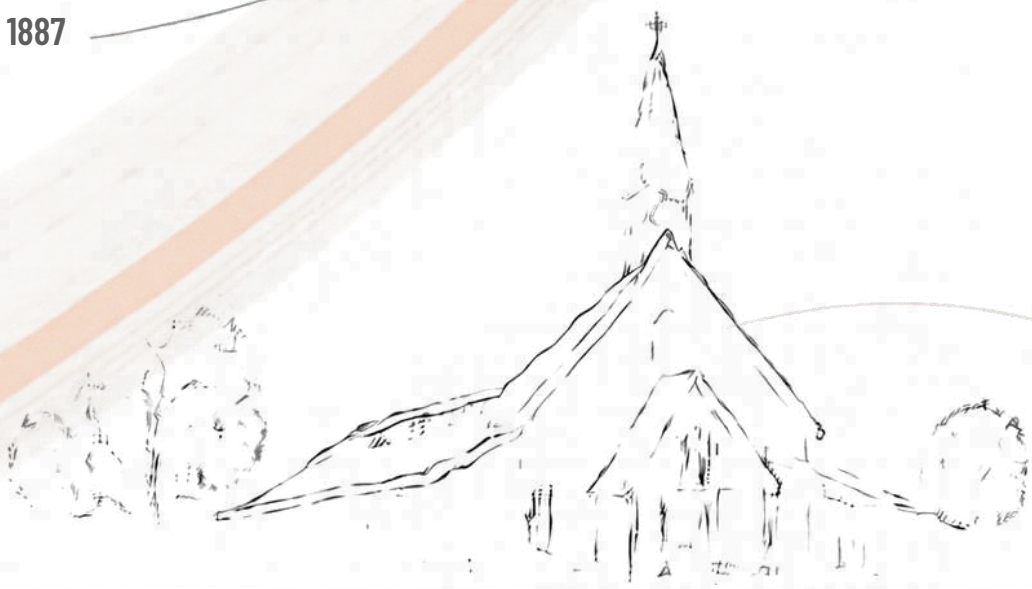
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Thank you for reading