

# THE MESSENGER

## ST. MICHAEL AND ALL ANGELS EPISCOPAL CHURCH



### COLOR & COMMUNITY: ST. MICHAEL'S ARTS CAMP

**"Community bringing people  
together."**

*--Donna Kirkwood, when asked to  
describe the camp's purpose in one  
sentence.*

*An inside perspective of the St. Michael's Arts Camp with insights from the  
director of Arts Camp, Donna Kirkwood, and camp counselors Gabby & David.*

**By Jack Welker**

Every summer, St. Michael's Episcopal Church opens its doors to creativity, laughter, and learning. The Arts Camp, now in its 14th year, welcomes children from places far and wide, such as Johnson County, Kansas City, Iowa, and even England for a week-long celebration of artistic exploration and community spirit.



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## ST. MICHAEL'S ARTS CAMP (cont'd.)

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Each day, campers move through six sessions, including painting, crafts, drama, and music. "We had six local artists that came to work with the children, and we had 19 counselors," director Donna Kirkwood explained. "They move from class to class. We serve lunch. Camp is from 9 to 3."

The program's reach is broad, with 17 schools represented this year, from elementary school to universities. Gabby Peach, a four-year experienced counselor who even attended the camp as a child, described the rhythm of the week: "Some of the artists make projects that are multiple days long. . . and they're all under time limits. So we try to help kids to make sure that they can get the most complete in the amount of time that we have."

For first-time counselor David Occhiogrosso, the experience was deeply affirming. "Donna always made it sound like such a great experience. . . and that's exactly what it was. I really enjoyed my time this year."

The camp also remains committed to accessibility, honoring the original values that the camp was founded on: to provide an affordable, enjoyable summer camp experience as an alternative to expensive, over-priced summer camps. "We do have scholarships to help out the families that are not able to afford paying," Kirkwood said. "If a child cannot pay that \$165, I start out by asking what's the most that they could pay . . we'll scholarship. We get private donations too that help with supplies or offset the cost of the camp."

Even the pandemic couldn't stop the momentum of the hard workers who make the arts camp possible behind the scenes. Though the traditional Friday art show and performance were paused due to COVID, the week still ends with an awards show and celebration. "We ask the kids what was their best thing, and a lot of them just say we had fun all week," Kirkwood said. "They always seem to leave happy."

Gabby said: "Seeing it from a counselor's perspective, you view every child instead of just yourself... you want them to be proud of what they've made, and feel like they've accomplished something over the week."



## ST. MICHAEL'S ARTS CAMP (cont'd.)

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Faith is present, even if quietly. “Do we say prayer every day? No, but it’s there,” Kirkwood said. “Kids will ask questions about the name or about the organ when we hear Ken [Walker] playing.”

Ken Walker, St. Michael’s music director and a member of Horizon Arts Ministry—the group that helped launch the camp—provides a musical backdrop that sparks curiosity and conversation.

The Arts Camp has a different theme each year it is held, with each theme based on a book selected by Donna and the Horizon Arts board. This year, the book they selected was *Maybe Something Beautiful: How Art Transformed A Neighborhood* by Rafael Lopez. The book’s main theme portrays how art can bring a community together, echoing the same values provided by the St. Michael’s Arts Camp. And at the end of the week, as campers head home with paint-splattered hands and proud smiles, Kirkwood and her team are grateful.

“It’s somebody blessing us every year to be successful and get through it without any problems . . . we get through it every year, and I thank God for that.”

**If you'd like to help support St. Michael's Arts Camp, we welcome your generosity. Every contribution helps make this creative space possible. Please reach out to Donna Kirkwood at [donna@stmaa.com](mailto:donna@stmaa.com) to coordinate any contribution.**



# GOOD FAITH NETWORK BEGINS FIFTH YEAR

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## HOW THE GOOD FAITH NETWORK ENABLES US TO LIVE INTO OUR FAITH

By Kate Capps



We promise in our baptismal covenant to “seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself” and “to strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being.” We can live into these promises right here right now, in our county.

We can fulfill these baptismal promises by moving beyond mercy to justice. Religious congregations excel at acts of mercy—food pantries, clothing drives, etc. But those wonderful acts have little effect on the causes of the suffering we seek to alleviate. Systemic change is required to get at the roots of unjust suffering: that means seeking justice through collective action.

The desire to strive for justice, to do what Jesus taught and did, is the reason the Good Faith Network was formed four years ago. St. Michael’s joined other interfaith congregations to identify the most pressing issues in our county, to seek solutions, to advocate for justice. GFN is now nearly 30 congregations strong and poised to grow.

What are the issues that we have identified over the last four years?

- A growing mental health crisis
- The need to end homelessness
- Lack of affordable housing
- The need for improved elder care

GFN members have conducted significant research into each of the issues and uncovered possible solutions that have been successful. We then advocate with those in authority—those who have the power to alleviate the problem, and we do so equipped with real knowledge and achievable solutions. We know that we alone cannot change the system, so we advocate for justice to those who can: our county commissioners. We support them in doing the right thing.

## GOOD FAITH NETWORK (cont'd.)

For example, the county commissioners studied the issue of a mental health crisis center, and they projected one for 2029. GFN identified local and state support for such a center and advocated for it. The crisis center is slated to open this month (September), a cause for great rejoicing. (It is noteworthy that of the 6 largest counties in Kansas, the most affluent—Johnson County—is the only one without a mental health crisis center.)

Some issues are more complicated than others, although an affordable housing trust fund (AHTF) should not be one of them. An AHTF is a dedicated, reliable pool of funding for developers of affordable housing. It is a financial incentive that makes it easier to build homes that everyday people can afford. What is this important? Over 40% of the people who work in Johnson County—including teachers, firefighters, and police officers—cannot afford to live here. The Board of County Commissioners has repeatedly cited the need for an AHTF in their reports since 2018. GFN continues to advocate for an AHTF, but it will take more people power to persuade the commissioners of the need.

You can be an advocate for affordable housing, ending homelessness, improved elder care, and care for mental illness by attending the Nehemiah Assembly on April 28, 2026. Make it a priority. Put it on your calendar now and show up for those whose lives can be changed by your advocacy! You begin advocating by attending a “Good Neighbor Conversation” this month and consider becoming a member of our parish GFN team.

If you want more information, visit [www.goodfaithnetwork.org](http://www.goodfaithnetwork.org) or talk with St. Michael's GFN team leaders Kate Capps, Crystal Danko, or Joe Adkins. Call the church office and we'll help you get connected!

**Together, we can fulfill the Good Faith Network's mission: “Honoring the inherent dignity and value of each person, we advocate for just solutions to support our most vulnerable with a united voice that won't be ignored.”**



## STMAA DINNER GROUPS

### A DIFFERENT WAY TO BUILD COMMUNITY

By Mary Weber

Getting people together builds community. This was the idea behind this Sunday night gathering of friends of St. Michael's. Rather than the usual dinner group, these people decided to do something different and include others. Long-time members mixed with new and inquiring members over an array of appetizers and beverages. Conversation was lively and interesting and those attending learned a bit about the church and became better acquainted with their friends.

Invitations will go out to parishioners soon for being involved in the next round of dinner groups, or you can contact Dan Wancura via the Realm app for more information.

**Pictured here are: (back row from left) Jean Pyle, Larry Ehren, Christy Dorn, Leslie Malle, Pete Malle, Marty Pyle, and Jeff Keltner. (front row from left) Jaime Keltner, Gretchen Sullivan, Beth Coughlin, and Mary Weber.**



## DIOCESAN TRAINING

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### **SAFE CHURCH, SAFE COMMUNITIES TRAINING ON SEPT. 20**

**By Karen Schlabach**



The Episcopal Diocese of Kansas is committed to providing a safe place for all people to share in God's love and celebrate the joy of following in the teachings of Jesus Christ. As part of that commitment, the diocese requires that people involved in the various ministries of the church be trained in things like inclusion, boundaries, abuse and neglect, power and pastoral relationships. This is no longer just for children and youth – the trainings include information about working with God's people of all ages.

Leader training is required for all clergy, vestry members and other elected/appointed leaders, ministry leaders, and children & youth ministers or volunteers, etc. Universal training is required for all of those plus key holders, altar guild, vergers, sextons, admins, volunteer office workers, etc. Both trainings will be offered at St. Michael & All Angels on Saturday, September 20, from 9:30 am to 3:30 pm. A light lunch will be provided for attendees and we will accept a free-will donation to cover that cost. All are welcome. Learn more and register online.

More details about this requirement are available in the diocese's Safe Church policy which is available on the diocesan website. For questions contact the Rev. Karen Schlabach at [kschlabach@episcopal-ks.org](mailto:kschlabach@episcopal-ks.org).



## EXPERIENCING GOD

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This summer saw the successful series of presentations at STMAA titled “Experiencing God.” These programs included: Sue Pingleton, with a remarkable lecture on “God in the Visual Arts,” particularly sharing her expertise in German art with us. On July 31, Dr. Richard Liantonio talked to us about the ways in which the Bible is used to attack and denigrate LGBTQ, and ways we can defuse that (photo on the next page). And on August 7, Don Compier spoke on Bob Dylan, looking at the sacred and the secular in popular music.





## CONCERT FUNDRAISER

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*"A songwriter of the highest order."  
--Americana UK Magazine*

### ERIN ASH SULLIVAN

**SATURDAY, OCTOBER 11TH  
7:00 PM**



Join us on October 11th for a very special benefit concert featuring award-winning Folk/Americana singer-songwriter Erin Ash Sullivan from Massachusetts.

Erin's music - sometimes heartfelt, sometimes funny - reflects a deep sense of place, and her lyrics are always authentic and drawn from her lived experience. Her 2024 album, *Signposts and Marks*, debuted at #4 on the FAI Folk DJ Chart. In 2025, she won the Al Johnson Songwriter Contest at the Wildflower Music Festival (TX). She has appeared on the mainstage of the Falcon Ridge Folk Festival and has played at numerous venues across the country.

Erin's music focuses on the power of stories to build connection and recalls the spirit of her music idols, including Joni Mitchell, Patty Griffin, John Prine, and Ellis Paul.

*Proceeds go to benefit P.E.O. International, supporting the education and advancement of women through scholarships, grants, awards, loans, and stewardship of Cottey College (MO). (\$20 suggested donation)*

Questions? Contact Donna Burchfield at [donnaburchfield@gmail.com](mailto:donnaburchfield@gmail.com).

## FALL EVENTS CALENDAR

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Being & Belonging class begins  
Sept. 3

Youth & Adult Sunday School & Youth Group begin  
Sept. 7

3rd Grade Bibles  
Sept. 7

Experiencing the Psalms class begins  
Sept. 11

Worship in the Park (Harmon Park)  
Sept. 21

Red Cross Blood Drive  
Sept. 26

Feast of St. Michael service  
Sept. 28

Blessing of the Animals  
Oct. 4

Nursery Brunch  
Oct. 5

Welcome & Connect Lunch  
Oct. 12

Oktoberfest Fall Festival  
Oct. 26

All Saints Sunday, All Souls Requiem  
Nov. 2

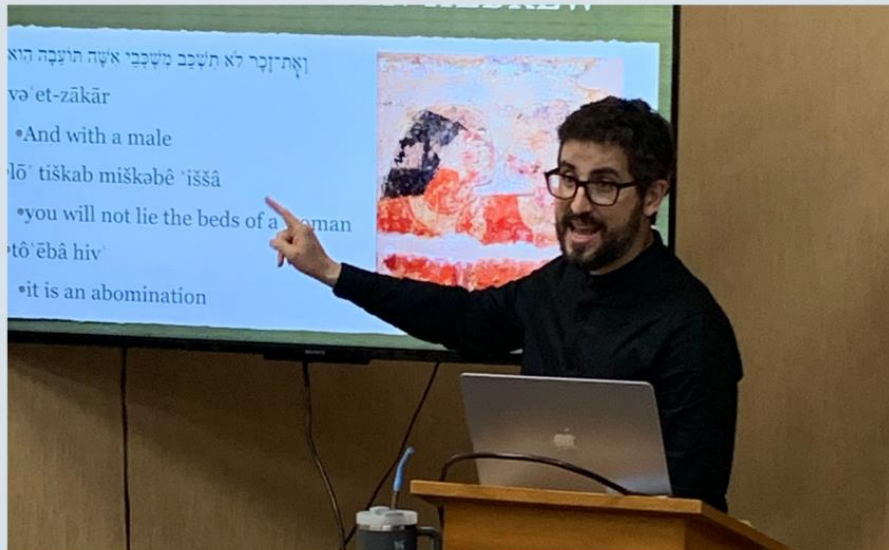
Men's Turkey Fry  
Nov. 6

Lessons & Carols service/Advent fest  
Dec. 7

Christmas Eve services, 4PM & 10 PM  
Dec. 24



## FINAL THOUGHTS



An action shot of Dr. Richard Liantonio, who delivered an excellent presentation on “De-weaponizing Scripture” recently at STMAA. He teaches Hebrew at St. Paul’s Seminary.

Parishioner Michael Box was passing by the sanctuary this month, and as the sun was just setting, he snapped the beautiful image you see below. Thanks for thinking of the *Messenger* for capturing our church’s beauty, and keep those cards and letters coming!

