

1970 - 2020

PARISHLIFE

The Newsletter of St. John's Episcopal Church

'The Times They Are A Changin'



Come gather 'round people, wherever you roam
And admit that the waters around you have grown

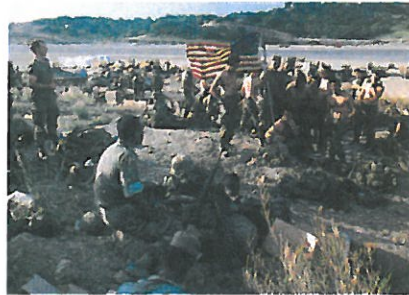


And accept it that soon you'll be drenched to the bone
If your time to you is worth saving
Then you better start swimmin' or you'll sink like a stone
For the times they are a-changin'



be later to win
For the times they are a-changin'

Come writers and critics, who prophesize
with your pen
And keep your eyes wide, the chance won't
come again
And don't speak too soon
For the wheel's still in spin
And there's no tellin'
who that it's namin'
For the loser now will



For he that gets hurt will be he who has stalled



Come senators, congressmen,
please heed the call
Don't stand in the doorway, don't
block up the hall

The battle outside
ragin'
Will soon shake
your windows and
rattle your walls
For the times they
are a-changin'
Come mothers and

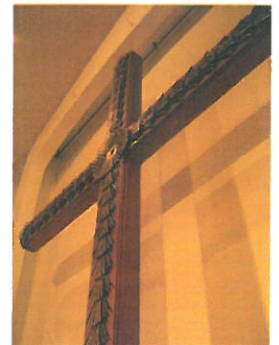
fathers throughout the
land

And don't criticize what
you can't understand
Your sons and your
daughters are beyond
your command

Your old road is rapidly aging

Please get outta' the new one if you can't lend your hand
For the times they are a-changin'

Bob Dylan



St. John's 1st Annual Meeting

January 11, 1971

The very first annual meeting of St. John's Episcopal Church was held on January 11, 1971. It began with a dinner; invocation by Father Boyle, then the meeting began at 7:45pm. There was an election of the Senior and Junior Warden and a report from the Treasurer. There was an acceptance of the Budget for 1971. There was an acceptance of the first Vestrymen; the Delegates to the Diocesan Convention, the Building Committee and the Finance Committee. Here are some excerpts of the annual meeting report:

"It is just a year ago this week that Mrs. Moss and I visited Naples for the first time. Bishop Hargrave requested that we look at the Site of Saint John's Church, and must confess, it did not overly impress us, for there were so many vacant lots all around, so we decided it would be too much for us to tackle. For after all, we are not as young as we use to be, so decided to spend the rest of my Ministry in my old parish in Schenectady. Then on February 2, 1970, the Bishop wrote asking us to reconsider and said, he thought I was just the Priest for this new work. The Holy Spirit must have been stirring up our lives for after a few weeks of deliberation we decided to accept the Challenge. So it was with some trepidation we arrived in Naples the 20th of April. No Episcopalians called to welcome us, our furniture was delayed and we did not have even a chair to sit on in the empty Vicarage. Doubts began to form in our minds if we had made the right choice in coming to Naples. Then we had our first service in the bank, and met for the first time a few interested Episcopalians who gave us a warm and sincere welcome. One of them said, "I have waited two years for you to come". Then I knew with certainty this was the work God wanted me to do, and since that time the interest and the growth has continued in Saint John's.

The first task as a parish is to offer ourselves, our souls and bodies as a Loving sacrifice, as we meet together as Christians, and as a family in Christ, born into it by the Spirit of God, offer our Thankfulness for the Blessings we have received.

We were fortunate to have the generous gift of a choice piece of land given by our friend, Mr. Ray Lutgert, so we shall ever be grateful for his generosity. We were also fortunate to secure the services of Mr. Walter Keller, architect, who sized up immediately our needs and on his draught board created just what we were looking for and within the estimated budget, which I think is most remarkable. We are getting a Church which is not only beautiful but one that will fulfill all our needs..

Now a great deal depends upon us as a congregation. Everyone must be involved in this great venture of faith and help us to build a strong parish thus increasing our Communicant status. We must search out and reach new families, taking a personal interest in each one. If you find Episcopalians or anyone who is looking for a Church home bring them to Church with you. There must be a Missionary zeal in our parish life. A parish family which reveals in its common tasks the pulsating life of God the Holy Spirit, loving the Lord and each other—then spreading this love to those outside the parish so in this way, in a few months-time our congregation will increase tremendously.

In closing may I say again, Thank you all for your loyalty, goodwill and constant support you are giving to strengthen my hands as your Vicar, may God Bless and guide us in all our deliberations and plans for the future and the building of a church to the Glory of God and the strengthening of our spiritual lives."



New Members:

Timothy Torrens & Elene Meury West.
Thomas Smith. Elizabeth Wood.



That Was Then...

25th Anniversary

Annual Report: January 27, 1995

Below is an excerpt from The Rev. William E. O'Connell, then Rector of St. John's Episcopal Church.

I shall highlight a few bullet points from his report to the parish.

"As I complete this third year and begin my fourth year as your rector, I am mindful of an axiom of life: 'We cannot allow the greatness or the fears or the disappointments of our past to be a drag upon our future, nor can we be so simple as to believe that in the future we can reap what we do not sow.' I take this opportunity tonight, as I stand in the midst of this family of God, to proclaim not only our faith in Him who loves us so, but also our determination to stand firmly upon His Word of Truth as we Journey into this new year that awaits us. In spite of the disappointments or fears that we experienced in 1994, and yes, even the moments of greatness, we will continue to sow the ministry that is ours in Christ, in 1995 - because, unless we do there will be no future for us as a family of God.

I want to speak about vision, for a moment; this vision for life as we begin our next twenty-five years, as we complete these last five years of the twentieth century. I see our family, St. John, as a community of faith that is firmly established in Christ. Daily we are to welcome Him into our life, receiving Him as our Savior and Lord.

God calls us to step forth into this new year with holy boldness and in faith. While our Journey will not be without its challenges, it will be filled with great opportunities to serve Christ and the world in which we live.

- ✚ First of all, I believe we need to expend greater energy in planning and strengthening our worship.
- ✚ Second, we need to live our life as a parish in such a way that we honor and affirm and care for the elders of our family and those who are sick or at home Christians.
- ✚ Third, the need for a full-time assistant has become more and more apparent to the Vestry and many others in Parish leadership.
- ✚ I want for us to be an open and caring and loving family of God. A family wherein our chief aim is to love the Lord our God and to serve Him in this world of His.

We are celebrating our twenty-fifth anniversary as "Church". This year of jubilee will be a time of remembrance and refreshment. We will celebrate the life we have lived on this journey and we will open our hearts to the rejuvenation of the Holy Spirit as we continue on our way. Know that the Lord our God will bless us and honor us as we strive to be faithful and obedient to Him - as we continue to love Him with all our heart, and mind and soul."

This Is Now

50th Anniversary

Annual Report: January 26, 2020

Below is an excerpt from The Rev Joseph F. Maiocco II, Rector of St. John's Episcopal Church.

I shall highlight a few bullet points from his report to the parish.

LOVE

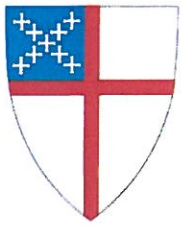
Paul shares in Corinthians "And now these three remain: Faith, hope, love. But the greatest of these is love." Love is the most powerful virtue because it communicates the essential reality of our Father's heart. God's love thru us in the power of the Spirit brings people into a saving relationship with Jesus and transforming love with others. When a person connects with our Father's love and the redeemed community, their life is changed forever into eternity!

St. John's Annual Report is full of expressions of God's love thru you!

Your Love in Action...

- ✚ Our worship continues to deepen as it faithfully expresses traditional, evangelical and charismatic streams. The choir inspires our worship, with ushers, lay readers, acolytes and altar guild enabling us to praise our God in heartfelt thanks!
- ✚ Coffee Hour is a wonderful place for fellowship between services. Foyers is in its 11th year with 128 participants, Centering Prayer averages 9 people since 2006, and we have numerous 12 step groups that bring healing to the Naples community.
- ✚ Order of St. Luke offered training for 15 people from various churches at St. John's, continues meeting weekly and hosting the monthly CHC potluck. We had a wonderful healing mission featuring Judith McNutt in February 2019 with record attendance and miracles!
- ✚ The St. Matthew's Dinner Ministry serves every Tuesday plus additional days, with healing prayer being offered after each meal. Spirit Alive continues to serve us through social outings, book studies, caring card ministry and facilitating the Healing Mission.
- ✚ Bible study offerings include men's women and coeds, with the Lenten study done in the context of Sunday sermons. Parishioner testimonies were part of this and led to the publishing of "The Hope that is in Us."
- ✚ Outreach Grant Celebration awarded 14 Collier Charities \$150,000 in grants to support their work.

St. John's Thrift Shoppe & Parishioners were the sources of this blessing! Additional Outreach support included Benevolence Funds (\$44,337); St. Matthew's (\$11,932); Ned & Sky (\$5,000); Michael & KB (\$5,000); Gary (\$8,500); CCO (\$5,000); Samaritan Health Center (\$14,000); Emmanuel Community Aleppo (\$14,897); Matthew 25 for hurricane victims (\$64,755).



Senior Warden's World

From the 25th Annual Report – January 27, 1995

Senior Warden Barbara Myrick

As I complete my term on the Vestry, I want to thank you all for the prayers and support you have given me. It is deeply appreciated. The Senior Warden is the Rector's warden as well as a representative of the congregation. Only through your prayers and concern for me have I managed this. I pray I managed well.

I have reflected on the words of Loren Mead of the Alban Institute, who was a speaker at the Diocesan Convention. He gave guidelines to forming new ministries and solving problems within a parish. He said we must prepare well in beginning any new ministry. A congregation is ever changing, never static, and therefore, goals have to be continually redefined. Money or an individual cannot bring about the ministry or the change. It has to be done with commitment and cooperation of all. I think we need to pay heed to his remarks as we discern the ministries of St. John's in the community.

MINISTRY IS THE JOURNEY, NOT THE DESTINATION.

The people of St. John's are the finest, the most caring anywhere and I thank you for the privilege of serving you.

And now to hear from our current Senior Warden, Donna Beecher

50th Annual Report

January 26, 2020

I have been honored to serve as Senior Warden these past two years. My work on the Vestry has included encouraging participation in our various ministries through Minutes for Ministry and articles in our parish publications. I enjoyed facilitating the Vestry's annual retreat—when we review where we are and set goals for the future. And, this year I had the pleasure of chairing the Nominating Committee for new Vestry members.

In addition to my Vestry responsibilities, I continue to experience the joy of singing in the choir, leading co-ed Bible studies, serving at St. Matthew's House, and engaging children in our Good News Club.

St. John's is an amazing parish and this year has been especially remarkable. Our improved technology has enabled people to connect through our website and live-streaming of our worship services. During Lent, we dove into Jesus's experiences through Alicia Britt Chole's 40 Days of Decrease – and followed along with sharing our own stories—leading us to publish: The Hope that is in Us. We more than matched the challenges of giving aid to victims of several devastating hurricanes. Our healing ministries have expanded with regular gatherings of the Christian Healing Center, and Prayer Teams now accompany us when we go to St. Matthew's House to serve dinners. Our Sunday School is bursting at the seam with new families, supportive parents and a children's program coordinator.

We have been doubly blessed. WE have so much to celebrate as we prepare for our 50th anniversary! Our challenge now is to follow God's will as we put our "double portion" and our many "talents" to full use for His Kingdom and to His Glory!!!!

Put These Dates On Your Calendar!

- ✚ Friday (2/14) – Deadline for March E-Newsletter.
- ✚ Lay Reader/Acolyte Training will be held in the Sanctuary on Saturday (2/15) at 3:30pm.
- ✚ You're invited to the Imani Children's Choir on Sunday (2/16) at 4pm. Invite someone!
- ✚ Ash Wednesday Services will be on February 26th at 9am and 7pm.
- ✚ Volunteers needed to share the Good News of Jesus Christ with 50 Collier County Public School children every Thursday from 2:30 to 4:30pm January 16-March 27. Contact Jamie Bentley at 239-595-9433.
- ✚ If there is anyone interested in teaching a junior moment, we would love it! Please see Dayna, our Sunday School coordinator for more information.

Jr. Warden Flashback!

Michael J. Wagner was the esteemed Jr. Warden for several years and reported the following for the 25th Anniversary, January 27, 1995:

Over the past several years, I have had the privilege of serving as Junior Warden. It has been a truly wonderful experience as I have come to realize just how important and varied the ministries are that have been entrusted to us at St. John's. Our Building and Grounds represent an opportunity for us to witness as a Christian community to the visitors and residents of Naples. The condition of our facilities and grounds demonstrate the high esteem which we place upon the House of the Lord. More importantly, the commitment and hard work of so many to maintain these facilities for the glory of God is a witness to our parish family and community. The beautification and re-landscaping of the Columbarium, updating the irrigation system, and addition of a storage and maintenance "hut" (Fr. Bill's description) are all fruits of these commitments.

During the past year, the importance of a constant maintenance program and reserve to fund this ministry have clearly been demonstrated. As we approach our 25th Anniversary, many aspects of the physical plant are going to need more maintenance and, in some cases, replacement. During 1994, we have seen two air conditioning systems need major repairs and in one case replacement...a forewarning of what might be expected with other numerous systems in our facilities. A section of roofing adjacent to Sugden Hall has been approved for replacement by the Vestry during the December meeting because of recurring leaks. Many of the finishes in our main church are beginning to show their anniversary years, including carpeting, finish on the pews, and exterior painting. These represent just a few of the areas that we as a parish must be attentive to in planning for the future here at St. John's. All of these areas represent a significant commitment in terms of time and money for St. John's to continue to the ministry to which we have been entrusted.

Christian Healing Center Introduces "THE SHAME THAT BINDS US"

Teacher: Skip Ruch
Healing & Prayer

2/3, 6-7:30pm: What is Shame and why is it so hard to talk about?

2/10, 6-7:30pm: Shame and the Bible

2/17, 6-7:30pm: Shame's Remedy

St. John's Episcopal Church – Sugden Hall

Jr. Warden of 2020!

Roger W. Stiefel was the Junior Warden serving from January 2017 thru January 2020. Let's hear his report of buildings and grounds:

2019 is now history, and for St. John's, it was a very good year. It is always a good year when there is no hurricane to deal with. Small problems seem to arise almost weekly, but these are easy to take care of. There were a number of large projects that were planned for and completed.

- ✚ The walkways and the exterior of all buildings were painted.
- ✚ The windows caulked and sealed along with repairs to damaged wood.
- ✚ One of the two large 10-ton air conditioning units in the church building had to be replaced along with replacing damaged duct-work.
- ✚ Problems with wiring to the organ was discovered and corrected. This was building wiring to the organ and not the organ.
- ✚ Because much of the wiring in the buildings is original, and since repairs and additions have taken place we had all the wiring inspected. It is now safe and conforms to local codes.
- ✚ Roof tiles on Sugden Hall and the church building had become dirty and mildewed. We found a reputable company that cleaned and sprayed the roofs. We will use them twice a year going forward to keep them clean.
- ✚ Sound panels were installed in the ceiling of Sugden Hall. This should help keep the noise level down during large functions and make it easier to hear.
- ✚ We replaced the three St. John's signs which are posted on the street. They had weathered and deteriorated over the years.
- ✚ In the Garden of the Resurrection the statue of the Angel carrying the soul of man to Heaven has been restored. It is striking and deserves a look if you haven't seen it recently. It is a wonderful work of art. The bells in the tower were also cleaned and restored along with plaques marking donors' gifts.
- ✚ And finally, the walkway lights have been painted.

St. John's is blessed with a great location and a lovely campus. Buildings are functional and beautiful. It has been the goal of Father Joe, the vestry and wardens to keep the campus in the best condition possible and to prepare for our 50th Anniversary Celebration.

It has been my honor to serve as your junior warden the past three years.

St. John's Outreach 2019 Annual Report

	2019 Preliminary	2018 Actual	% of Total 2019	% of Total 2018
St. John's and St. John's Thrift Shoppe Outreach Grants	\$150,000	\$150,000	37.9%	48.6%
Benevolence	44,337	42,960	11.2%	13.9%
Church of God/Aleppo	14,897	12,737	3.8%	4.1%
Missionary support	23,500	6,000	5.9%	1.9%
Hurricane relief:				
Florence / Harvey	0	11,851	0.0%	3.8%
Michael / Irma	0	11,852	0.0%	3.8%
Dorian	64,755	0	16.3%	0.0%
Diocesan Support	70,621	65,224	17.8%	21.1%
St. Matthew's House - Golfathon	8,121	7,114	2.1%	2.3%
Misc. Charity Gifts / Feed the 5,000	19,852	929	5.0%	0.3%
Total	\$396,083	\$308,667	100.0%	100.0%

Revenues:

2019 Preliminary / 2018 - Actual	\$1,217,126	\$923,293
Thrift Shoppe Contribution	60,000	65,000
Special donations:		
Outreach	45,500	66,100
Benevolence	42,964	53,614
Total	\$1,365,590	\$1,108,007

Outreach compared to Revenues

29.0% **27.9%**

Parishioner Volunteer Outreach Ministries:

St. Matthew's House Dinners
Stitches of Love
Habitat for Humanity
St. John's Thrift Shoppe
Christian Healing Center



St. John's Thrift Shoppe
14700 Tamiami Trail N
Naples, FL 34110
239-597-9518
Mon. - Sat. 10 AM - 5 PM
www.stjohnsshoppe.com

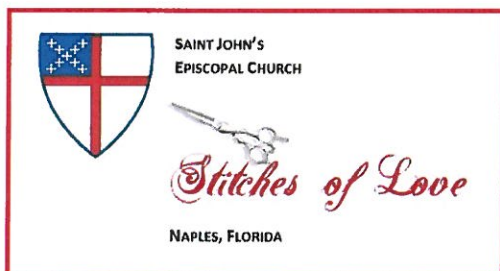


Thirty plus years old and still "sharing the love" through this living Ministry known as St. John's Thrift Shoppe. Though the friendly faces and names of volunteers have changed throughout our long history, we continuing the tradition of giving back to our community through our Parish's Outreach. For our volunteers, it is truly the "Gift of Giving". The ultimate reward is in the overwhelming appreciation of the local charities that benefit from all net proceeds the Shoppe. There are many ways you can share in the fellowship and love of this Ministry.

Volunteer....Bring a friend along and Volunteer your time at the Shoppe. Daily tasks include receiving and sorting donations, pricing merchandise, mending, ironing, and friendly customer assistance. Another reward is in the "first look" at the bargains of quality merchandise available for your purchase. Daily shifts are mornings and afternoons. Other Volunteer opportunities include being a board member, special events, marketing, advertising, and promotion of the Shoppe through local organizations. Stop by and take a tour.

Check out our Facebook page.

St. John's Thrift Shoppe is part of the "Outreach Ministry of St. John's Episcopal Church"



NO Idle Fingers at Stitches

The latest **Stitches project** has given all our members a chance to exercise their creativity. We have all been making Fidget Quilts. These are place mat -sized rectangles usually made with six squares of fabric of different textures and colors sewn to a heavier base fabric. On each square is attached something to explore or feel. Zippers, chains, jewelry, beads, washers, buckles, all kinds of small objects. These Fidget Quilts become

objects for memory care residents to explore. Staffs in memory care centers find they provide a wonderful tool to calm fidgety fingers and provide a focus and diversion for their residents.



New projects for Stitchers are on the horizon, and we encourage all knitters and sewers who have for years contributed many dozens of prayer shawls, newborn baby caps, and quilts to keep on stitching. Stitches is meet-



ing on Friday mornings at 10:00 a.m. in Brewster Hall and we delight in welcoming anyone interested in joining us.



JOIN SPIRIT ALIVE FOR A SPIRIT FILLED, UPLIFTING AND INFORMATIVE TOUR AND LUNCH AT ST. MATTHEW'S HOUSE

Monday February 10th provides St. John's family and friends a special opportunity to see, learn, and support our partnership with St. Matthew's House. Their mission accomplishments are truly spirit driven and the results the best in the country. They will provide a comprehensive tour, lunch, and amazing facts to help educate us.

Monday, February 10, 2020
St. John's Episcopal Church
Tour of St. Matthew's House Naples Campus
11:00 a.m. – 1:45 p.m.

RESERVATIONS IN THE CHURCH OFFICE DUE BY NOON, MONDAY FEB 3

11:00 a.m.	Arrival 2601 Airport Road South – Main Thrift Store Greet guests – park in east side lot – close to mobile pantry Walk to Justin's Place feeding ministry – 2691 Airport Road S
11:10	Begin tour with Gabe Miller, Program Manager Tour building and terrace where lunch buffet is served to anyone who comes
11:30	Walk back to Thrift and talk about Social Enterprises – Car Wash/Thrift Ops/Cafe
12:00	Walk to Campbell Lodge – point out Lulu's Kitchen and Justin's Village
12:10	Arrive Campbell Lodge – Restroom break and proceed to lunch
12:20	The President and CEO, Reverend Vann Ellison to greet the group – Thankfulness for support/volunteer work & update on mission
12:50	Break up into groups of 8 and begin touring shelter
1:30 – 1:45	Tour conclude and walk back to parking lot for departure

Have you :

1. *Visited the new all -purpose room and main campus renovation?*
2. *Visited the Thrift Stores (any or all of the 5)?*
3. *Used one or both of their catering companies?*
4. *Used their car wash?*
5. *Visited their café?*
6. *Heard about their hotel and conference center?*

The above generate what percent of the amount needed to operate all of St. Matthew's House initiatives?

Can you answer these questions?

What three primary areas does St. Matthew's House focus?

What did St. Matthew's house begin with, some 30 years ago?

How many hot meals do they provide each year?

Each year how many individuals are provided with housing and meals through their residential programs?

Since 2010, how many men and women have completed the year-long Justin's Place Recovery Program?

What is the % of graduates that maintain a life of sobriety more than two years after completion of the program?

IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS PLEASE CONTACT DON OR KATY ESTERLINE: 517-206-4643 / 517-206-4641



The Sunday School would like to thank everyone for visiting their Art Display during Coffee Hour on January 19th. The children have been working hard on learning about the Fruits of the Spirits and wanted to share their work with you all. As you saw, they have learned about five Fruits of the Spirits so far and will continue to learn about the last four in February. They will be displaying artwork from the last four Fruits of the Spirits on February 23rd during Coffee Hour. We hope to see you all there!

After the holiday season, the children have been learning about kindness and giving back. We have talked about kindness, different ways to be kind, giving back to our community and how we can show kindness to everyone! In addition to spreading kindness, we have



joined the Crayon Initiative! "The Crayon Initiative collects used and unwanted crayons donated from restaurants, schools and homes across the country, then melts them down and remanufactures them, reducing environmental waste. More than a half-million pounds of crayons are discarded annually throughout the U.S. That equates to roughly 60 million crayons! Better yet, the

recycled crayons are distributed to art programs at children's hospitals across the U.S., brightening the lives of young patients during their stay." There is a Crayon Initiative donation box in the Sunday School Room. Please feel free to bring all of your broken and unwanted crayons and let's help brighten the lives of children, while at the same time helping keep those crayons out of the landfills!

This year, some of the Sunday School children will be making their First Holy Communion in May. In March 2020 will be starting our Communion classes during Sunday School.

For those families interested and wanting more information, please contact me. I will be happy to talk about the details with you!

Dayna Sottosanti



Foyer Groups are off to a great start with 126 parishioners signed up! Many have already had their first meeting and others have them scheduled in the near future. The Group Leaders have everything working well and all participants should enjoy a fun time getting acquainted with their fellow parishioners.

Mary Frances and John Aiken

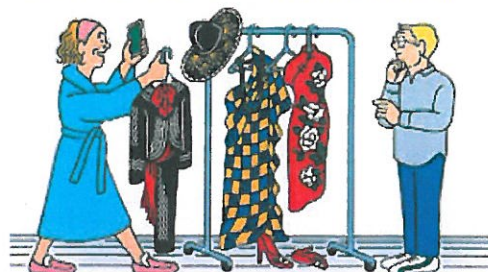
Join Us For Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper!
Tuesday (2/25) from 5 – 7pm!



(George Koch and Charley Horton whippin' up some chocolate chip flap jacks in 2019!)

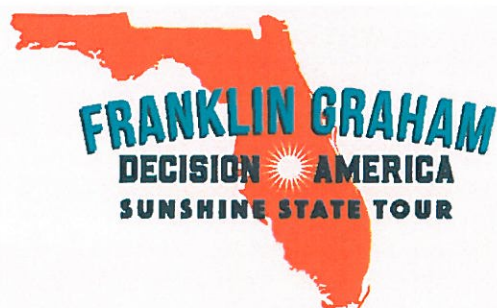
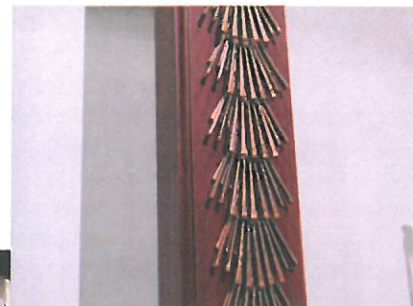
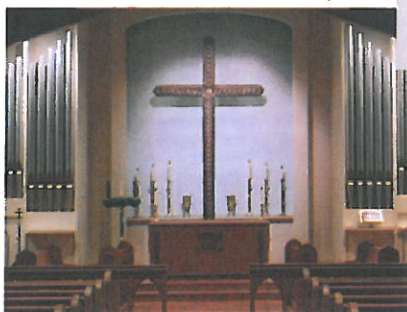
Stop by Sugden Hall on Tuesday (2/25) from 5-7pm to celebrate Shrove Tuesday! The men of the parish will be cooking up some grub for you to chow down on. No reservations necessary!

St. John's Shoppe – An Upscale Thrift Donation Day: Wednesday, February 5th
10am to Noon! Please Donate!



St. John's Sanctuary Focus

Just as the central focus of our Christian religion is on the cross of our Savior, Jesus Christ, when one enters St. John's sanctuary its most arresting feature is the fifteen foot tall mahogany cross behind the altar. It was constructed and installed in 1971 by artisan/craftsman Emilio Galagaraza, an Inca Indian who had emigrated to Naples. It was given as a memorial gift by Mr and Mrs Christian Harper. The 1,747 nails in the cross were installed by artist Mario Berny. They are reminiscent of the medieval nails found in the rubble of England's Coventry Cathedral after its destruction in a WWII Blitz bombing and then offered as memorials to raise the money to rebuild the Cathedral. St. John's altar was a memorial gift of Mr and Mrs Arthur Peaty.



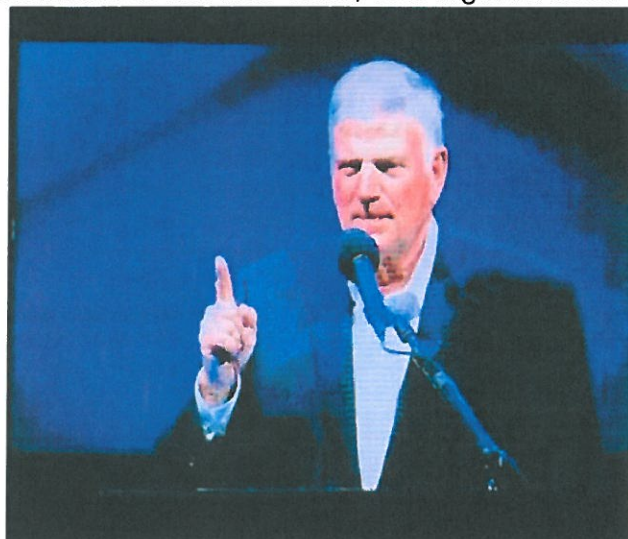
Fr. Joe, Jan & Lisa Maiocco, Cindy Brooks, Mary & David Tilney, Bonnie Schlichting & Arlene Austin attended Franklin Graham's Decision 2020 event at Hertz Arena. After an outdoor reception & words from his daughter and two sons, the program started with hymns & patriotic songs by a local group,



followed by an energetic performance by Christian Rock singer/songwriter Jeremy Camp & his wife, Melissa. Rev. Graham talked about his path to faith & Evangelism, he urged Christians to find their voice, vote & get involved in their communities to counter the progressive agendas

we are seeing in the media. He spoke of all the projects undertaken by Samaritan's purse & continuation of the works of the Billy Graham Evangelical Association. He invited the audience to come to Christ & offered prayers & bibles.

Arlene Austin. (Pictures by Arlene Austin)



Please enjoy Chapter 8 from 'The Hope that is in Us'
SEEK ME WITH ALL YOUR HEART

*"I know the plans I have for you....
You will seek me and find me
when you seek me with all your heart."*

Jeremiah 29: 11,13 (NIV)

I believe God had plans for me even before I was a twinkle in my Dad's eyes. Somehow, growing up in a happy but not particularly religious family, I always believed in God.

My earliest recollection of God being talked about occurred when I was a skinny six or seven-year-old changing out of my wet swimming suit in an old wooden bathhouse, as my aunt, a Christian Scientist visiting from far off California, taught me the Lord's Prayer!

Learning about the Pilgrims was all I remember from the eighth grade confirmation classes in the Congregational Church.

After I married Phil, a cradle Episcopalian, I slept in while he went off to church.

Fast Forward. Three children later, all baptized and in church with us every Sunday, I began to deal with Jesus. Who was He, anyway? I looked for Him first in the public library. (I didn't find him.) Our priest gave me a little better direction, and eventually I accepted Jesus as Lord. I was confirmed in the Episcopal Church and God became my part-time consultant.

Fast Forward. A new couple at the coffee hour talked about Jesus as though they really knew Him! Strange! Not long after several other strange "God incidences." I found myself with Phil, on my knees on someone's living room floor. A truly born-again moment. God became my full-time boss. A few years later, Cursillo in the mountains of New Mexico. A heavenly spiritual high!

Fast Forward. St. John's Naples. Children all leaving the nest. A witnessing community reaching out to me. A twenty year journey of regular church involvement and attendance. But there were many weeks when I never thought about God from Sunday to Sunday. God had again become my part-time consultant.

Unhappy with my faith journey, I asked a good friend, Joan Warren, what I might do. Joan organized a handful of women who committed with us to a weekly morning meeting with the goal of growing spiritually. At first there was no difference in my life except I had to admit to the group that God had again been pretty much forgotten. But then it changed.

One of the women in the group said that she would get up every morning at 6:00 a.m. for the coming week to pray for me if I would get up at 6:00 a.m. to spend some quiet time with God. It was one of the most touching gifts I've ever received, and it changed my life.

Quiet time with God is now a daily part of my life, and "Grouping," as we call it, has made the biggest difference in my spiritual journey. Support, prayer, encouragement, and love for one another—all these in abundance. But most importantly, my needing to be honest with the group has kept me honest with myself.

Recently, God has been speaking to me powerfully through his Word. The words "I have plans for you" keep going through my mind (Jeremiah 29:11). Until now, however, I never saw Jeremiah 29:13, just two lines later, "You will seek me and find me *when you seek me with all your heart.*" And that has become my verse.

The more time I spend seeking Him, the more I realize what an awesome God He is and how unbelievably great is His love for me, for us. God has been filling me with incredible joy and gratitude. What I seek is more of God because I know He has plans for me, plans to prosper me and not to harm me. And whatever His Plans are for me, He will be with me every step of the way.

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Treasurer: Bob Matthews

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