

ST. MARY OF THE HILLS EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Spring Newsletter 2025





Lenten Message from the Rector

Dear Friends,

On Wednesday, March 5, our journey through the season of Lent begins. Services of Holy Eucharist with Imposition of Ashes will be offered throughout the day – 7:00AM, 12:00PM, and 6:00PM. This annual reminder of our mortality, frailty, and brokenness begins a forty-day trek of penitence, reflection, and discovery.

The shape of our worship will change during these weeks – the confession of sin moves to the very beginning of our liturgy, penitential language features more prominently, we cease singing or saying the ancient hymn of praise *Gloria in Excelsis* (Glory to God in the highest), we omit all use of the word ‘*Alleluia*’. All these shifts and absences seek to point us toward a deeper understanding of God’s presence and our need of God’s mercy.

Throughout these weeks, I invite us to read Henri Nouwen’s classic book, *Life of the Beloved: Spiritual Living in a Secular World*. One reviewer describes Nouwen’s work in this way – “(What) began as a conversation between friends...(the book) explained the spiritual life in terms that he and other friends living a fast-paced, city life could understand. Nouwen plumbs the depths of what is most personal and vital in his own Christian faith...”. I hope you will join me in reading this simple, yet profound approach to our faith.

In the Rector’s Forum, I look forward to returning to a series we began several years ago. *Signs of Life: Why Church Matters* was developed for use in early 2020, ahead of the pandemic, by the brothers of the Society of St. John the Evangelist and Virginia Theological Seminary. We began it in March of that year but were unable to complete it because of lockdown measures. This year, we will pick it up again, trusting that rich conversation and reflection will once again emerge.

On Fridays, a regular time for the sacramental rite of Reconciliation (commonly called Confession) is offered from 11:00AM each Friday until the Way of the Cross is prayed at 12:00PM.

It is important to say always that these days of Lent are preparatory, not punitive. The forty days of this season seek to deepen our relationship with God, revealed to us in Christ Jesus, the One whose mercies know no ending. The acts of giving up or taking on are not about punishment, but about making space in our lives to discover afresh the ways in which God is making us new.

Know that I am praying for you, in this season and always.

Faithfully,

The Rev’d Andrew J. Hege

Formation & Worship Opportunities for the Season of Lent

Book Study: 'Life of the Beloved' by Henri Nouwen
Noon | Tuesdays | Barrett Room

Join Fr. Andrew in reading Henri Nouwen's classic book, "Life of the Beloved: Spiritual Living in a Secular World." One reviewer describes Nouwen's work in this way – "(What) began as a conversation between friends... Nouwen plumbs the depths of what is most personal and vital in his own Christian faith...". A conversation circle will convene on Tuesdays, from noon until 1 pm, in the Barrett Room.

'Listening to Your Life': Journaling as a Lenten Practice
10:30 am | Wednesdays beginning March 5 | Barrett Room

Journaling is a beautiful spiritual practice particularly when it involves reflecting on the Daily Office and Lectionary readings. Please join us on Ash Wednesday morning, March 5 to learn more about this spiritual practice as a Lenten discipline. The group will meet every other Wednesday during Lent either on Zoom or in person in the Barrett Room from 10:30 am – 11:45 am or so. For more information please text Owene Courtney at 904.553.7338 or email owene_courtney@yahoo.com.

Stations of the Cross
Noon | Fridays | Church

Stations of the Cross will be prayed each Friday in Lent, beginning at noon in the Church. Materials are also available in the Church to pray the Stations individually or in a small group at other times.

Special Program: Fifth Sunday Parents Circle
9 am | March 30 | Parish Hall

Parents of children newborn to high school are welcome to join together for a Fifth Sunday gathering with coffee and conversation on March 30. We will meet together at the fireplace in the fellowship hall from 9:10-9:50 am. Children can be dropped off in the nursery or upstairs for Formation in the St. Luke room. Michelle Curry will be hosting.

Rite of Reconciliation
11 to 11:45 am | Fridays during Lent

The Reconciliation of Penitent, commonly called Confession, is available on Fridays, 11 am to 11:45 am, and at any time by appointment. Contact Fr. Andrew if you'd like to make an appointment or to learn more about the Reconciliation in the Episcopal Church.

The Rector's Forum
9 am | Sundays weekly | Barrett Room

In the Rector's Form, we'll return to a series we began several years ago. "Signs of Life: Why Church Matters" was developed for use in early 2020, ... This year, we will pick it up again, trusting that rich conversation and reflection will once again emerge.



Staying in the Know

Message from the Vestry

Parish life at St Mary of the Hills is off to a good start in 2025. Sunday youth programs are being expanded. The Rector's Forum hit the ground running through Luke and, recently, a five-part series exploring different ways to faithfully interact with religious diversity. I have had reports that other studies of the Word of God are active in different men's and women's groups. Individual studies of the Word have also been encouraged by highlighting the latest edition of "Forward Day by Day" and especially the upcoming contributions in April from our own Owene Weber Courtney. The daily readings found in Forward are those of the Daily Offices and are accompanied by a brief commentary and an opportunity to fold in your prayers and those on our prayer list. Building up this Body of Christ through God's word is a significant part of our mission, especially in trying times.

Speaking of our Mission, the Outreach Committee approved and funded \$63,733 to local, regional, national, and international projects in 2024. We have assisted in feeding, clothing, and supplying medical supplies and treatments to those in need. We have aided in hurricane relief at the local and diocesan levels and continue to do so, as the need is more significant than previously comprehended. For the third year, we are supporting water developments for clean water supplies in the newest diocese in America, the Missionary Diocese of Navajoland. We have sent funds for generators in Ukraine and supported Episcopal Relief and Development, which is on the ground during significant disasters and wars. We have five teams supplying five meals to Hospitality House each month, and I would be remiss if I didn't mention that each team is always seeking more volunteers. One thing is for sure, if you are looking for a place to contribute at St Mary of the Hills, it is easy to get involved.

In this parish, significant pledges have been made and are still being received in support of the larger 2025 budget that the Vestry passed in December on faith that our giving would match our visions for our Ministry. Thank you to all those who have submitted your pledge. If you haven't yet submitted your pledge, we in the Vestry encourage you to do so.

As I look at this year in front of us, I see many opportunities to serve Christ. I have encouraged each member of the Vestry to get involved and grow into the parish and the loving environment in which we exist. I encourage each of you to do the same. May we consider a new expression for the 3 R's - Reading, Reflecting, and Re-engaging?

Grace and peace,

Mike Austell, Senior Warden



Parish Life Highlights

The Pilgrimage of the Purcells

Parishioners Peter & Valerie Purcell visited Rome during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. They offered a presentation during the Rector's Forum one Sunday. Below are some images from their trip.



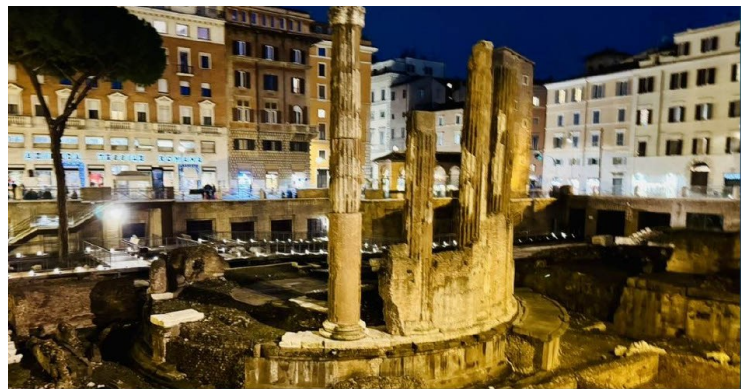
This is the “classroom”, a beautiful library in a residenza formerly owned by members of the Italian royalty.



The Purcells' group with the Holy Father. They got to meet him briefly and he was very friendly, joking and shaking hands with the group.



This is the altar of St. Paul's Within the Walls, a beautiful Episcopal Church in Rome, built by wealthy Americans shortly after the unification of Italy.



The Largo di Torre Argentina, near the Anglican Centre, where most of our meetings were held. This is the site of the assassination of Julius Caesar.



‘Silence Between the Noise’

Message from the Choirmaster

I am struck by Fr Andrew’s recent homily in which the idea of silence played a primary role. Everything that is good and natural is calling us to silence this time of the year—the trees are asleep, occasional snow lays down a gentle cushion upon which to lay our overstimulated senses, the long nights beckon us to be still. Despite the rude, loud, chaotic, and ceaseless noise with which 2025 seems to have roared in, Andrew’s recent homily reminds us—exhorts us—to create, respect, and observe silence. Communal silence.

The liturgical season of Lent asks of us the same thing. It is, along with its sibling reflective season of Advent, my favorite time of the liturgical year, largely because silence, slowness, and depth of feeling are quietly exalted. The wealth of music composed for these seasons, especially for Lent, represents the very finest that a millennium of artists have created. We at St Mary of the Hills are fortunate and privileged that our liturgies grant us the opportunity to sing music from this great body of treasures. The choir is busy at work on Lenten gems by Byrd, Purcell, Victoria, Duruflé, Poulenc, and others. Pay attention to the role of silence in this music, to the gap it provides between phrases. It’s often where the magic lies.

If you are interested in exploring the possibility of singing in the choir, please chat up a choir member, and speak with me at church or send me an email at choirmaster@stmaryofthehills.org. The choir is limited in number by available space, but we are always eager to find enthusiastic singers of any voice part, basic requirements being a good ear, a workable voice, a positive and collegial attitude, an eagerness and ability to learn, and a desire to make beautiful music to the best of our abilities. Don’t be shy.

Keep singing. And don’t forget the silence between the noise.

Jim Bumgardner



Chance Encounters

Message from the Formation Director

As we round out the season of Epiphany, brimming with symbols of light at every turn, we enter a sacred season of a different kind. Stories of reflection and contemplation, hope and despair, love and hate, joy and sadness flood our senses throughout Lent. The luminous darkness pierces the soul in a beautifully balanced way, if we're open to it. Feelings of longing, love and humility, all so very real and equally as indescribable, merge into our very being.

As a people accustomed to moving within the confines of what we can see and name, entering unidentifiable spaces within ourselves, within our faith, can prove to be a little tricky. And then we're reminded: This is the space where we find Him, where God meets us.

On a windy, three-layers-of-clothing type of day, I wondered the woods of the Pacific Northwest while on retreat during 2025 [FORMA conference](#) in Seattle, WA. The Puget Sound to my left, magical moss and the greenest of trees to my right, I set down a path, thinking all I'd encounter would be more woods. Then I ran right into it: The Ninth Station – Jesus Falls a Third Time. During Lent, we pray the Stations of the Cross every Friday at St. Mary of the Hills. We rotate through the 14 Stations recalling the series of events through which Jesus spent his last days. We move from his condemnation into his burial.



The Puget Sound



An encounter with Station XII

Unbeknownst to me, this retreat center has a set of outdoor Stations. The beautiful, moss covered monuments are awe-inspiring. I didn't follow the Stations in the order we pray them, but that didn't matter. Each of the moments I ran into a Station was a surprise encounter with God. Now, I can hold each of those moments close to me as I pray the Stations during the Lenten journey I take with you all this season. Whether praying the indoor Stations at St. Mary's or elsewhere, or while praying the outdoor Stations we share with our neighbors at Rumble, each step holds possibility and wonder.

Where might your chance encounter with God be in the coming weeks?

Lindsey Herring

ST. MARY OF THE HILLS

St. Mary of the Hills Episcopal Church | 140 Chestnut Drive |
Blowing Rock, NC 28605 | 828.295.7323 | www.stmaryofthehills.org

PARISH STAFF

The Reverend Andrew J. Hege | Rector

The Reverend Samuel V. Tallman | Assisting Clergy

The Right Reverend J. Gary Gloster | Assisting Clergy

Dr. James Bumgardner | Organist/Choirmaster

Lindsey Herring | Director of Christian Formation & Communications

Michael Marshall | Director of Administration & Finance

Bill Devereux | Director of Hospitality & Facilities

Michelle Curry | Verger

**For pastoral emergencies, contact
The Reverend Andrew J. Hege at:**

Office: (828) 295-7323

Cell: (336) 848-4052

rector@stmaryofthehills.org