

August 21st, 2020

In “normal” times, this would be the time of year when we would start announcing the fall program for the year, hang out the welcome sign for Cal students moving back to campus, start choir rehearsals, plan newcomers events, and start looking forward to the many holidays and events the fall brings.

While these are definitely not “normal” times, I’m happy to say there is still a lot to look forward to! We are doing our best to explore just what are the ways we can not only stick together but also grow as Christians and as a community during what is becoming “a sustained experiment in virtual church.” Chief among them will be a discussion program called “Sacred Ground,” on the second Thursday evening of each month. This is a dialogue curriculum put together by the national Episcopal Church on matters of race and faith. This is important work for St. Mark’s to be doing, and it was far and away the most frequent request for new programming from the summer’s parish survey. See below for more information, and for a link to register.

You also asked for book studies, film groups, Bible studies, and ways to explore spiritual disciplines. These are coming too! We’ll begin with a film night (also see below) in the next few weeks, and continue with a monthly forum series, Advent and Lent book studies, online foyer groups, and more. While we may be forced to experiment with “virtual church” just now, our lives and connections with one another remain very real; God remains very real; and the challenges and joys of faith remain very real. Our program this year is designed with that in mind -- to help us engage more deeply with one another, and more deeply with God. The overarching question seems to be, “What kind of community is God calling us to be, and how do I enter more deeply into what that might require of me?” Over the course of the year I’m sure we will learn new and fruitful ways of answering that question.

In the department of “comings and goings,” I’m very happy to say that our administrator, Toni Murdoch, will be back from maternity leave starting Monday, August 24. Send her a note to welcome her back! In the meantime, I’m extremely grateful to Kim Novak, Margo Strakosch, Todd Snow, Paul Porter, John McChesney-Young, Bruce Alexander, and the other volunteers who took on the mammoth undertaking of filling her shoes over these last 12 weeks. When I think about these things I am filled with gratitude -- that we are, first of all, so fortunate as to have such a capable administrator, and second of all that we have so many ready and willing volunteers to step in when they are called upon.

Finally, a word about the fires. We have been asked to be the “coordinating congregation” for our deanery when it comes to fire relief. So far this means keeping communication clear between that group of parishes and the diocese about what is needed locally and what help is available. Depending on what is needed, we may be asked to do more. Some of you may remember the Oakland Hills Fire in 1991 -- at that time St. Mark’s was a hub of relief efforts, collecting and distributing supplies as well as information. At the moment it doesn’t look like it will come to that, but one never knows. In the meantime, please keep a lookout for evacuation orders or warnings in your area, and please pray for all affected: for evacuees, firefighters, victims, their families, and all who are fearful for what comes next.

Yours faithfully,

Fr. Blake+