

Epistle for the Homecoming Issue of Enews
The Reverend Mark Sutherland
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Homecoming this Sunday marks the traditional post Labor Day reboot – and is a particular feature of American church life. What can we look forward to in the St Martin’s 2023-24 church program? The mantra we’re using in thinking about the coming year is *less is more*. Big activity laden church programs don’t work well in today’s rapidly changing world. Most of us are not only busier than is healthy for us to be - but as the role of church community continues to evolve in today’s world our social lives move between multiple focal points. If church features at all as a focus for social networking, then it’s only one of several competing focal points in our lives. Nevertheless, our over-busyness is counterbalanced for many by an increasing trend towards individual isolation and loneliness. While many of us are too busy for church community, yet for others it’s church community that offers an antidote to isolation and loneliness!

Perhaps this helps to account for what more recent survey findings reveal as a modest post-Pandemic uptake in church attendance and strengthening of financial stewardship. Keeping this very much in mind - what we can look forward to in the coming year will encourage us to explore new creative and nurturing opportunities for both individual spiritual growth and friendship formation, but also community engagement and outreach.

The start of a new program year brings a desire to explore new creative avenues in children’s formation, adult education, and in our worship and music programs. A new and exciting opportunity comes with our engagement in the diocesan movement known as *Wild Worship* – an outdoor worship experience fostering a deeper connection between spirituality and environmentalism. We are hosting our first such experience at Swan Point on the afternoon of Sunday, September 17th. More details in this E-News.

The mainstay of adult formation will continue to be our small group-based experiences ranging from the weekly midday zoom reading group, weekly meditation hour, to the monthly men’s book, writing, and luncheon groups, along with women’s spirituality group, and knitting and hospitality ministry. Small group settings enable what I call portal ministry – ministering not only to one another (those of us already here) but offering entry points into our community life for those feeling their way (those in the wider community who are looking for something more).

Outreach is a crucial focus for our activity in the coming year. Outreach involves sharing our financial abundance with organizations serving the needs of the wider community. Outreach also takes another less recognized form. This involves hospitality – by which I mean the offering of our facilities to outside groups and organizations – ranging from public music concerts to weekly AA and related group meetings. We currently host many outside groups including five AA groups, one Al-anon group, a piano teacher, and a caterer as well as a vibrant Mother’s Morning Out Program and occasional concerts.

Less is more means flexibility and variety of opportunities to learn and grow together as people accompanying one another on our common faith journey. I am excited by the prospects of what lies ahead in 2023-24.

This Sunday we are back in church – pity it’s still so humid. **Remember there is only one service at 10am – no 8am.** A word to the wise - there will be ice-cream in front of the church after the service. I look forward to welcoming you back this Sunday.

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