



ST. JAMES EPISCOPAL CHURCH

A joyful, inclusive community

November 16, 2017

Feast of St. Margaret, Queen of Scotland

Common Prayer in a Divided Nation: A Pastoral Letter from St. James' Rector and Vestry

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

On behalf of the Vestry, I invite you to a special meeting of the congregation on Sunday, December 3, at 11:30 a.m. for a conversation about our common prayer. We will explore together how we pray for our President, Donald Trump, other leaders, our nation, and the world in a time of great anxiety and division in our country. How do we pray together when we are not of one mind about important moral and political issues? What principles guide our decisions about how we pray? What is the relationship between public prayer and private prayer? These are just some of the questions shaping our conversation.

These are perennial questions in the life of the Church. As a Vestry, we have begun a conversation about them that we would like to extend to include the congregation. In preparation for our gathering on December 3, we would like to offer some background and reflections for your consideration.

Some Background

The Book of Common Prayer (BCP) is the touchstone and authority for our common prayer in The Episcopal Church. In addition to the BCP, The Episcopal Church also has authorized common prayers in a supplemental text, *Enriching Our Worship* (EOW). The structure and language of our worship is guided by these two texts. Note that the BCP includes the Church's *Catechism*, and its teaching on "Prayer and Worship" is found there on pages 856-857.

"The Baptismal Covenant" is the heart of *The Book of Common Prayer*, and expresses our shared vocation and mission as disciples of Jesus Christ. Our prayer and our life is shaped by the promises made in Holy Baptism (pages 304-305), and should be reflected in how and for what we pray.

The "Prayers of the People" is the part of our common prayer where intercessions and thanksgivings are made, expressing joys and concerns. This is where the "rubber hits the

road” in terms of how and for what we pray together. Forms for the Prayers of the People are found on pages 383 – 393. The directions governing their use make clear that these forms *may be used* and that adaptations or insertions *may be made*. These forms are models meant to be imitated. They may be freely adapted by local congregations.

Recently, in The Episcopal Church and at St. James, the question has been raised as to whether and how to pray for the President by name. While nothing requires that this be done, Form V of the prayers provides the option to pray for public officials by name, and this option has become standard practice in many congregations when this form is used. St. James has followed this standard practice for many years, at least since the adoption of revisions to *The Book of Common Prayer* in 1979.

Some Reflections

As a Vestry, we recognize that many people find it difficult to pray for President Trump by name, even as we affirm it is important that we do so. President Trump has boasted of being a sexual predator, and invoked nationalist rhetoric giving cover to the worst white supremacist elements in our common life. It is important to note that members of our congregation, more than half of whom are women, include people targeted by President Trump’s rhetoric, behavior and policies. Some people find it painful to pray for him by name. This is a genuine pastoral concern, and not a matter of partisan politics. We unequivocally reject and condemn racism and sexism in all its forms.

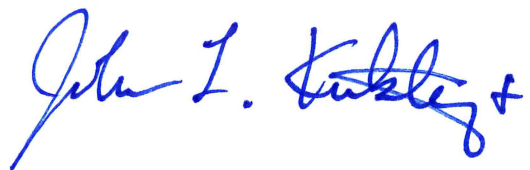
We also acknowledge that our congregation includes people who voted for President Trump as well as those who did not. For those who support the President’s policies, and even for many of us who do not, to refuse to pray for him by name in our common prayer indicates a lack of Christian generosity and forbearance that we’ve extended to his predecessors. It risks sending a message that only members of one political party are welcome at St. James.

Jesus teaches us to love our neighbors as ourselves (Matthew 22:39). He also teaches us to love our enemies, do good to those who hate us, bless those who curse us, and pray for those who abuse us (Luke 6:27-28). We pray for them for the sake of their repentance and transformation; not to endorse their behavior. We pray for them so that we do not lose our humanity and become what we hate in the process of resisting evil. This is not a matter of being “nice,” but of refusing to be defined by anything other than the boundless mercy of God. In the words of our Presiding Bishop and Primate, The Most Rev. Michael Curry, “When we pray for our enemies, we may find that we are simultaneously emboldened to stand for justice while we are also less able to demonize another human being.”

We agree with Presiding Bishop Curry’s statement that President Trump and other leaders need our prayers, and we need to pray for them. How to do so is the question. How do we make clear through our prayers our commitment to strive for justice and peace, and respect the dignity of every human being? We hope you will join us on December 3 for an

honest, civil, and respectful conversation about the challenge of common prayer in a divided nation. We also commend for your consideration the [Statement of Episcopal Church Presiding Bishop Curry regarding prayers for the President](#).

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "John L. Kirkley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the end of the last name.

The Rev. John L. Kirkley
Rector

On behalf of the Vestry of St. James:

Tracey Thomas
Senior Warden

Ann Rieger-Matthews
Junior Warden

Carol Overman
Clerk of the Vestry

Meg Bloomfield
Colin Cooper
Sandra Dratler
Brad Drda
Roger Wickstrom
Ed Wilcox