



# CHURCH MOUSE

Fall 2023—St. John's Episcopal Church 1707 Gouldin Road, Oakland, CA 94611

## Rector's Letter

### The Rev. Scott Denman

*Let go and let God.* This was a favorite saying at Judson Baptist Church where I attended when I was in high school. This spiritual act of letting go is one that is embraced in old-time religion but also in monastic spirituality (surrender) and mindfulness (release). Letting go is the ultimate act of freedom. The spirit of letting go is not one of disengagement but rather one of trust in a higher power present to help and to guide. Letting go is the ultimate act of love and faith. Nonetheless, it is hard to do.



We have been living in a time that requires letting go of what we have known. The pandemic stripped us bare of our plans and routines. The experience opened our eyes to see the world and the church through a different lens. What does it mean to be a church? What does our future look like? How might we imagine stewarding our community into a hopeful future?

I find hope in the stories of our faith. God asked Moses and Aaron to toss down their prized staff, a symbol of leadership, tradition, and identity. When they let go God turned that staff into a snake. When God asked Moses to pick up this staff again it was a snake. In other words, picking up the staff was a scary thing to do. But by picking it up again Moses would use it to part the seas and bring water from a rock in the desert to quench the thirst of the people. These symbols resonate with other Greek traditions which inspired the familiar medical symbol of a snake coiled around a staff that decorates pharmaceutical packaging and hospitals alike.

Sometimes we find ourselves clinging to the things we value and rely on. Letting go of them is hard enough but watching them turn into snakes is frightening. Yet snakes represented healing in ancient tradition. So when God asks us to pick up those things we let go of there is a renewed sense that they belong to God, and not us. That is when the future opens up.

St. John's has been through so much over the years. The pandemic was a period of radical letting go, surrender, and release. What comes next is a time of taking up our staff with a renewed sense of openness and profound sense that our ministry belongs to God. How will we part seas and satisfy the spiritual thirst we see in our world?

At St. John's we are on the cusp of a new beginning and I am excited to see where God leads us. With your generous help we now have a full staff team and are about to undertake a huge transformation of our campus that will open our spiritual home to the broader community in a safe and inviting way. Just as our ancestors paid it forward, purchasing and building the St. John's we now enjoy, I am grateful for all of you who, because of your faith and generosity, are making it possible for us to reach another amazing point in our history as we pay it forward in new ways. Thank you for stepping up to be part of this new beginning for St. John's!

In Jeremiah 29 we read one of God's many promises to God's people: "For I know the plans *and* thoughts that I have for you,' says the Lord, 'plans for peace *and* well-being *and* not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope."

Scott+

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# From the Senior Warden

Pat Harden



Dear Friends,

It's dark in the mornings when I wake up now. Nights and days are cooler, falling leaves blanket the driveway. And I'm heading into the final three months of my surprise term as your senior warden. What an adventure I never expected to have in my life! You know that annoying commercial about "young people becoming their parents"? It does happen. Both my mother and stepmother were "church ladies." Stepmother Gloria was the first female senior warden at her church in Kansas City.

I want to take this opportunity to share my experience of vestry service. Why? Two reasons:

1. I believe the reputation of the Vestry deserves an upgrade. When we began recruiting new members last year, several of us discovered that serving on the Vestry had a somewhat ominous reputation. Some individuals rolled their eyes when we mentioned it, while others politely changed the subject or suddenly felt called to visit the restroom.
2. This fall we are actively recruiting at least four new members for three-year terms on the Vestry. We are seeking people of all ages, backgrounds, and diverse experiences who want to share their time and talent with our community.

After three years of service, I'm here to tell you vestry service doesn't deserve its bad rap. This past year, our Vestry collectively agreed to focus on amping up our visibility, fun quotient, and engagement in parish life. The goal was for our vestry service to be deeply impactful and meaningful. We didn't neglect the hardcore business of the church, reviewing budgets and expenditures and making policy decisions. We asked and encouraged the hard questions. But I believe we accomplished our work along with much more than a modicum of uplift, inspiration, and support for each other.

Serving on the Vestry provides an opportunity to personally influence the direction of the church. It's also an opportunity to develop new friendships and deepen existing relationships while working together to address the big challenges we face and fostering the steady flow of new projects that keep St. John's vibrant and relevant. My goal as senior warden is to ensure that "all are welcome," heard, respected, and included, echoing our communion invitation.

Learning more about all the good that St. John's brings to our community and the world, I have gained a much deeper appreciation for our amazing parish community, dedicated clergy, and staff. Serving on the Vestry has helped me grow spiritually and opened my heart. I invite you to consider joining this blessed community of talented people who are committed to serving St. John's and supporting each other.

Thank you to both of my mothers for their example of how life-enriching vestry service can be.

With love and gratitude,  
Pat

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# From the Associate Rector: God's Bending Time

The Rev. Kathleen Moore

As I write this message, I have not yet started at St. John's, though I have made the big move to Oakland. However, by the time you read this, I will have started with you and we will be on our new journey serving together.

And so, in writing this message, I am time traveling! *I know, I know — stay with me.* I've been thinking a lot about time in these weeks of transition. I've been living in the Pacific time zone and working Eastern time zone hours. I've been watching the calendar as my November 1 start date seems both a long way off, and suddenly very close.

Time seems a little more fluid, a little less straightforward. It can feel disorienting and even frustrating as my body often can't even guess if it's 8 or 11am without looking at a clock.

But there has also been something spiritually strengthening about this period of "bending time." Because God's time is bending time.

The second letter of Peter tells us, "With the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day." In other words, time is not as tamed and contained as it may seem.

But oh, do I want to tame time! I want to schedule my days and my years, and know with certainty what is going to happen and what to expect. Yet that's not how God works and, in truth, that would be awfully boring.

I can't know exactly what is going to happen or what to expect in these first days, weeks, and months with you. But I can focus on the joy, excitement, and possibility as we start this journey traveling God's bending time together.



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## Episco-Speak

Here are some of the terms used to describe the people and roles within the Episcopal Church.

**Presiding Bishop** The chief pastor and executive officer of the Episcopal Church. The current Presiding Bishop is The Most Rev. Michael Bruce Curry who was elected in 2015 for a nine-year term.

**Bishop** Chief pastor of a diocese. When addressing a Bishop, you may simply call him or her "Bishop" or, for example, "Bishop Marc." However, it is never polite to address the bishop as "Hey Bish...", or refer to him or her as the "person with the funny stick and hat."

**Priest** An ordained member of the clergy set apart for particular ministries and authorized to celebrate Holy Communion and pronounce God's forgiveness in worship. After three years of seminary, a person is ordained a transitional deacon (not authorized to celebrate Communion or pronounce absolution) and, about a year later, is ordained a priest.

**Rector** A full-time priest elected by a vestry with the bishop's approval. The rector has responsibility for the conduct of worship and the spiritual jurisdiction of the parish.

# 2023 “Come Together” Auction Was Fun and Successful

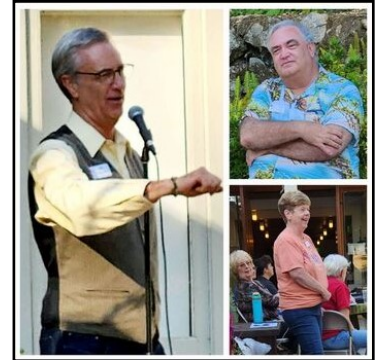
Laurie Bennett

St. John’s “Come Together” party on Saturday, August 26 was highlighted by the “Stump the Rector” live auction items. Ultimately, Lilah Greene won Rev. Scott’s sermon. The “Stump the Associate Rector” item was even more competitive and finally won by Tim Hart who will take great delight in testing Rev. Kathleen’s talents.

As a result of all the activities (raffle, silent and live auctions, and party proceeds), more than \$25,000 was raised for the church. This will be split between the 2023 and 2024 operating budgets.

Attendees and organizers offered perceptive comments:

- The party on the patio was fabulous. It creates a good model for future auctions and big events by having it in the daylight, not moving pews, utilizing the beauty of the setting, and offering childcare and food for kids.
- Vestry participation was appreciated and thought to be the most enthusiastic ever.
- People especially enjoyed the party and outing auction items and would like to see sponsored hikes, gambling parties, or food items for purchase.
- The event could have been longer, such as from 4-7pm, to allow more time to socialize.
- The next auction should be in early May 2025 to allow more people to participate in person. A large committee should be assembled in Fall 2024 to achieve even greater success.



Huge thanks to all the auction committee members who donated so much time and talent to “Come Together”: *Kathy Araujo, Laurie Bennett, Pat Harden, Sarah Jones, Ann Lester, Jim MacIrvine, Judi Marr, Anne Meyer, Tina Popenuck, Gene Williams*

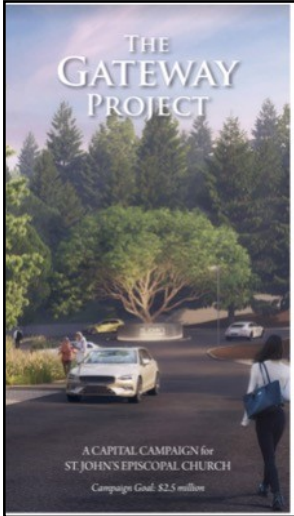
And to all the donors, bidders, and raffle ticket buyers, *thank you so much* for participating. We hope you had fun. Please email Laurie Bennett ([lebennett1950z@gmail.com](mailto:lebennett1950z@gmail.com)) and Sarah Jones ([sarahcjones@sonic.net](mailto:sarahcjones@sonic.net)) if you have ideas for the 2025 auction or other St. John’s community gatherings.



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# Gateway Project Update

Julie Knell and Victoria Robinson



By now, many of you have met with a St. John's "volunteer visitor" in preparation for Pledge Sundays, November 5 and 12. Word is out that these meetings have been informative, positive, and even inspiring. Always, they have been a reminder of the special community we share.

To date, over \$1.6M has been raised for The Gateway Project and members of over 50 households have been visited. If you haven't met with a visitor yet, you will be hearing from one soon. There are a couple of new volunteers who will be visiting members of the congregation, so stay tuned and be prepared to enjoy the connection.

If you haven't heard some of the powerful testimonials given at church from our Gateway campaign supporters, connect with a Sunday service online through the Friday email. The enthusiasm is palpable and will leave you asking where you could fit in. Every single gift matters and is an investment in a vibrant future.

A final reminder: while there are many among us who like to deliver our pledge cards as part of a communal offering on pledge Sunday, keep in mind that they can also be mailed or dropped off at the office if that's more convenient.

Deepest gratitude to every one of you for your dedication and passion.

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## St. John's Armchair Travelers

Ken Fuller

We have a hit! Armchair Travelers has met twice this fall to great response. In September the Felders presented their travels in Alsace, France, and in October Nancy Kho shared about hiking New Zealand's South Island. We'll meet again November 15 when Judi Marr will share photos and information about the British Virgin Islands.

Mark your calendars for the second Wednesday of each month, noon to 1pm. Bring a lunch if you'd like and meet us in the sacristy.

John Seals will present in January and we're still looking for someone to share in December. Please contact Ken Fuller, Thunder572002@Yahoo.com, for more information or to volunteer to present December 13.



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# Analogies are Funny Things

## Stewardship 2024 - Bee Generous Campaign

Lilah Greene



Sometimes analogies fit right in with the message you are conveying and sometimes they have a limited fit. Sometimes an analogy communicates in more ways than one. I feel that is what's happening with this year's Bee Generous campaign.

I have written previously that the benefits of our community are like honey produced by our St. John's hive. We ask you to support St. John's with your pledge contribution so that we can continue to produce that wonderful honey. Our honey benefits our core community and beyond. St. John's is a vital participant and presence in Montclair, Oakland, the Episcopal Church, and the world at large.

The analogy of Bee Generous honey has yet another place in this conversation. In our world, which runs largely on money in every sphere, we can be tempted to think of our personal capital as our personal honey and, like the bees, we may resist sharing our sweet harvest. And that is why, as you may have seen, I wore a bee suit when the pledge campaign was launched on Sunday, September 24.

So many demands compete for our personal money/honey. The St. John's community is full of generous people who spread their bounty to support different needs. During past stewardship campaigns, we have invited you to list the various organizations you support. The composite list is long! Occasionally, parishioners have told me that they choose to support other organizations in a particular year. While not disparaging individual choices, I'm here to remind you that you never know when you will need St. John's for that unique, surprising, particular time of life and, in that spirit, I continue to call on you:

Bee Generous with your spiritual home, so that your spiritual home/hive will be able to support you when you need her.

Pledge Sundays are November 5 and 12 – 2024 goal \$600,000





## Holiday Bazaar

Sylvia Ahern

If you're dreaming of a mall-free Christmas, the **Vision Holiday Bazaar on December 10** may be your answer.

Calling all cooks and makers: we are seeking stocking-stuffer items, decorations, and kitchen gifts—your famous spiced nuts? Fudge to make folks swoon? Pickled okra? (wait, no...) Lime marmalade? (that's better)—to add to the inventory.

New this year, we have two other ways you can contribute:

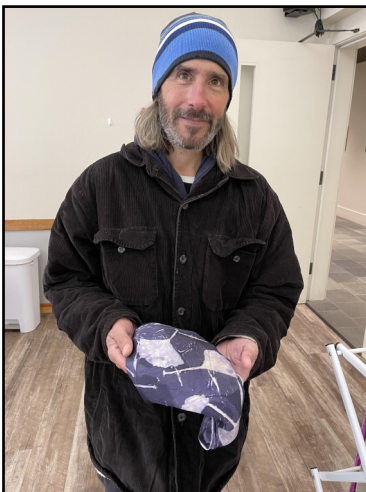
- a **White Elephant table** (please donate UNUSED gift items to this table)
- a **Gently-used Jewelry table**, to which you may recycle the giftable necklaces, bracelets, and earrings now languishing unused in your vanity. Please price your items before bringing them in.

Pastor Vinnie will offer a short talk following the 10am service, and in the Reception Room, you will find all manner of SaraKnits, Sylvia's botanically-printed silk and wool scarves, pickles to die for, jewelry, and more. **All proceeds will benefit VISION and VISION/WARMTH programs.**

Contact Sara Evinger ([sevinger551@gmail.com](mailto:sevinger551@gmail.com)), Sylvia Ahern ([sylvia.ahern@gmail.com](mailto:sylvia.ahern@gmail.com)), or Ray Riess ([rayriess@lmi.net](mailto:rayriess@lmi.net)) for more information or to offer help and/or ideas of your own.



## Vision Warmth is Back!



Racks and bins are available in the narthex for donations to help the unhoused population weather the cold months.

**Please bring blankets, adult coats, socks, and shoes to St. John's whenever you come to campus.**

Collected items will be distributed weekly on Thursdays.

# Parish Retreat

## May 10-12, 2024

Kathy Araujo

Mark your calendars for the biggest, bestest Parish Retreat ever! **Scheduled for Mother's Day weekend, May 10-12, 2024**, your retreat planners are moving into high gear to plan games, talks, walks, meditations, massages, and gatherings so there will be something for everyone.

Additionally, the Rev. Dr. Fran Toy and two of her biographers are enthusiastic about having a forum to discuss the book about Fran's exceptional life and career.

We have reserved the whole Ranch, with places for ram-bunctious families, sedate quiet seekers, and everyone in between. If you haven't been to a Parish Retreat for a while, we hope you will plan to come.

So what will it cost? Let me ask you a question: *How much would you expect to pay for a 2 ½ day stay in the wine country?* Staying in a hotel or BnB and going out for meals might run you anywhere from \$1,500 to \$3,000. The Bishop's Ranch is still a good deal.

Estimated costs are:

- Cottages \$1200 each (capacity per unit – 8)
- Ranch House From \$850 to \$1000, depending on room capacity
- Harrison House From \$850 to \$950, depending on room capacity
- Webb Lodge \$750 each (rooms for 2 or 3)

We will have an **"Early Bird Special"** price, so don't delay when registration opens February 1. Partial scholarships will be available.

**This retreat weekend is about us, all of us**, from the youngest to the oldest. We haven't had a full community gathering since before the Covid lockdown – this is our chance! If you have any questions, contact Kathy Araujo ([kathy@stjohnsoakland.org](mailto:kathy@stjohnsoakland.org)).





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# Support for Oakland's Temple Sinai

Nancy Kho

In the immediate wake of the heinous Hamas attack on Israel on Saturday, October 7, many of us struggled with how to respond in a meaningful way. Our Jewish and Israeli neighbors were traumatized, and it was also clear that innocent people in the Gaza strip would be harmed by an Israeli counterattack. In the week that followed, with division and hatred highlighted on social media and in the streets, the challenge was to find a response that showed compassion, faith, and a recognition of complexity and shared humanity of the situation.

A few members of St. John's found a step to take that was simple but felt profoundly meaningful. Earlier in the week, Senior Rabbi Jackie Mates-Muchin had issued an invitation to the greater Oakland inter-faith community:



*My community and I are having a difficult time. The details of the atrocities committed by Hamas are inconceivable; women raped, murdered, and paraded naked through the streets, babies decapitated in their cribs, entire families kidnapped. It is so horrible. And of course, the details also bring up, for us, other times in our history where Jews were so brutally murdered. We appreciate that so many countries have decried Hamas' actions, including ours, and yet we are feeling alone.*

*Of course, there is a lot to unpack and discuss about the overall situation with Israel and Palestine, and there must come a time when peace is a possibility. But right now, our East Bay Jewish community is in need of friends and support. We understand that there has been a call put out to rise up in support of Hamas and we are concerned that could mean individuals seeking to do harm to Jewish communities. We are feeling vulnerable. In that spirit, I want to invite you to join us for Shabbat Services this Friday night.*

*May the One who makes peace in the high heavens make peace for all of us here on earth.*

*In friendship,*

*Rabbi Jackie Mates-Muchin*

A few of us agreed to meet at Temple Sinai where some of us had attended b'nai mitzvahs in the past. The beautiful space, at the corner of 28<sup>th</sup> and Webster Street, was packed with worshippers who welcomed us warmly when they saw our St. John's name badges.

Rabbi Mates-Muchin started the service by welcoming "our friends in Oakland from other religious faiths," asking the St. John's contingent to wave hello. But we weren't alone: there was a pew full of Southern Baptists, a Methodist minister, and a faith leader from another congregation in the city. With the announcement of each group, I could hear audible gasps around us. "This is so kind," whispered the women behind us. "This is so beautiful." I felt the same way – at a time when there is so much to criticize about Oakland, this interfaith support for our vulnerable neighbors gave me unexpected hope.

One of the members of Temple Sinai had a cousin who was killed by Hamas on October 7. We know this is a complex geopolitical issue, but there is nothing complex about demonstrating to neighbors that they do not suffer or grieve alone. Nor is there a debate around whether innocents everywhere deserve safety and peace.

We will continue to seek ways to support our Jewish neighbors at this difficult time. Our intention is to also find ways to support Palestinian and Muslim neighbors in Oakland who may be vulnerable or grieving as well. If you know of ways to do that, please contact Father Scott and/or me at [Nancy@DavisKho.com](mailto:Nancy@DavisKho.com).

I'll close with a prayer from the Jewish prayer book that made me catch my breath, and an invitation to meditate on what it means for you:

Pray like everything depends on God.  
Act like everything depends on you.

# Get Ready for Advent night

Saturday, Dec 2, 4-7 pm

Come one, come all to prepare St. John's for the Advent season which begins the next day.

We will gather to decorate the sanctuary with wreaths, greenery, and lights, make Advent wreaths to take home, create decorations, and eat our famous ziti pasta.

**There is no cost for dinner.**

Friends and extended family are welcome, too. Watch for an email to RSVP the number in your group so we will prepare enough yummy food.



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# Mindfulness

Ashley Henderson, LCSW

If we stay open in meditation, we can't help but come into contact with our fragile places. This may be why we are intimidated by silent retreat. We intuitively know the inevitability of this contact when we are not distracted.

Allowing ourselves to not only touch into our most tender places but to sit and stay with them is powerfully healing. We give ourselves permission to feel, to surrender to the shame, the grief, the anger, the panic, and we simply stay, witnessing, experiencing what has patiently been waiting for our attention. And when we stay and feel and witness, a love arises on its own to hold us there. We can feel a loving presence that reassures us, that says yes, yes, here. And then at the center, at the heart of the pain, we discover our power, our joy, our freedom that was trapped there. A return to deep knowing, unconditional love, an anything is possible heart opening. This is our power. This is the reconnection to self that always calls you back to you.

As we practice this and realize that our true power lies in the core of our fragility, we begin to go there willingly. We begin to see our emotions as guides, as portals to deeper healing and freedom. We can relax more into Life rather than contracting or resisting. We can even be excited by this journey, wondering what may be revealed next that will send us deeper into the truth of who we are. What an incredible gift of being embodied that we get to keep waking up to this truth. Everything we have ever wanted is right here in the center of our most vulnerable places.

Is retreat calling you? Are you ready to connect more deeply to your true power? Join me in November for a deep dive into the truth of your being. More information at [www.mountainmeditationgroup.com](http://www.mountainmeditationgroup.com)

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## Thornhill Street Sign

After three years without St. John's signage on Thornhill, Linnea Adair and Bob Kridle decided to do something about it: they installed a traditional Episcopal sign that reads "The Episcopal Church Welcomes You" with an arrow indicating that drivers should turn right on Gouldin Rd.

The back of the sign features a touch of whimsy, a church-shaped birdhouse to be enjoyed by dog walkers, families walking children to Thornhill Elementary School, and other pedestrians.

Thank you, Linnea and Bob!



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## Upcoming Events

### Important Dates

Nov 24-25 - St. John's Office closed - Happy Thanksgiving  
Dec 2 - Advent Night, 4-7pm  
Dec 3 - Advent begins  
Dec 7 - Montclair Stroll  
Dec 12 - Men's holiday dinner  
Dec 21 - Solstice Labyrinth walk at Noon  
Dec 25-Jan 1 - St. John's office closed  
Mar 1-3 - Women's Retreat  
May 10-12 - Parish Retreat

### Special Worship Services

*Join us for worship  
Sundays at 7:45 & 10am*

Dec 3 - Intergenerational Sunday; Advent Lessons & Carols, 10 am  
Dec 21 - Blue Christmas, 7 pm  
Dec 24 - Christmas Eve:  
7:45am Eucharist; 4:30pm family service; 7pm Choral service  
Dec 25 - Christmas Day service: 10am  
Dec 31 - Christmas Lessons & Carols, 10 am

The Rev. Scott Denman, Rector  
Editor: Siv Ricketts  
Layout: Kathy Araujo

## Men's Annual Holiday Dinner

Ken Fuller

All men aged 18 and over are invited to St. John's 20th (or thereabouts) Annual Men's Holiday Dinner on December 12. Please consider joining in for catching up and conversation, dinner, prayers, and fun. Social time will start at 5:45pm and dinner around 6:45pm.



Start thinking now about how you will contribute to the event: what dish will you bring to share (the main course will be supplied)? Willing to show up early (5:15pm) to set-up chairs and tables? Might you also bring some "greens" to decorate the tables? We will exchange gag/repurposed gifts valued at no more than \$20, so be on the lookout.

On the Vestry? No problem! The Vestry meeting will take place that evening at 7pm. Male vestry members are encouraged to arrive by 5:45pm and bring something to share at the dinner and a like-dish to take to your meeting. Of course you'll also take your dinner plate to the meeting.

I will send an email in late November to start a list of who is bringing what. If you have questions or aren't on the men's email list, please email me: Thunder572002@Yahoo.com.

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## Durable Dishes for Sale

A recent inventory of St. John's storeroom has uncovered 50 place settings of the same ceramic, white dishes that are used in our kitchen. The plates are 8 and 10 inches in diameter, the bowls are 6 inches and mugs are 3 inches high. They are microwave, oven, and dishwasher safe. These still boxed, never used dishes are for sale:

\$2 per piece, \$8 for a place setting, \$30 for a set of four place settings or 16 individual pieces

Contact Laurie Bennett ([lebennett1950z@gmail.com](mailto:lebennett1950z@gmail.com)) if you would like to purchase, or make an offer for all of it. Such a deal.

